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**“I don’t want people laughing
at me for hiding Jews at my place . . .”
The Case of Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski**

In 2003 the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem started to publish a monumental work: *The Encyclopedia of the Righteous among the Nations*. Prof. Israel Gutman was made editor-in-chief of the series. The volume devoted to France (ed. by Lucien Lazara) was published the same year. Two volumes regarding Poland (ed. by Sara Bender and Szmuel Krakowski) and a volume about Holland (ed. by Jozeph Michman and Bet Jan Flim) were published in 2004. The encyclopedia of the Righteous from Belgium was published in 2005 (ed. by Dan Michman). A two-volume encyclopedia covering Europe and other countries was published in 2007.

The encyclopedia of the Polish Righteous is more than 1000 pages long. Consequently, the entries portraying the heroes and their actions had to be very concise. There was enough place only for basic personal data and an extremely brief description of the circumstances in which help was provided. One could say that the entry in the Righteous encyclopedia constitutes the tip of an iceberg, barely visible above the surface of the water. The dramatic concatenation of human fortunes; the richness of the historical as well as social, customary and cultural context; the emotional tension and moral dilemmas; the clash of strength and weakness, of heroism and cowardice, of nobleness and meanness – all this remains hidden, unspoken.

Let us choose only one of the thousands of histories described in the Yad Vashem encyclopedia of the Polish Righteous and let us reveal all that could not fit into the encyclopedia entry. Let us allow for the sources to speak. Let us examine the layers of texts that build up the narration about Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski. Let us start the reading “from the end,” i.e. from the most contemporary texts to the ones created on the spot, at the time of being in hiding. Such an organization of the reading process will help us reveal the foundations of the iceberg, which are invisible on the surface.

1.

On 25 May 1988 the Council for the Righteous among the Nations at the Yad Vashem Remembrance Institute decided to award Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkow-

ski with the Righteous among the Nations medal. Subsequently, on 11 June 1988 the Director of the Department for the Righteous sent a letter addressed to Halina Krzyczkowska resident in Nasielsk¹, in which he informed her about this decision and mentioned that due to their difficult financial situation, the Council would turn to the Claims Conference organization in New York to ask for financial help for the awarded. The Honorary Certificate is dated 7 April 1991. This certificate is the last act of the whole process – the tip of an iceberg.

From the chronological point of view the encyclopedia entry from 2004 is the latest text regarding the Krzyczkowskis' case.² It tells us that at the beginning of May 1943, Marian Berland, his wife Marysia, his sister Leosia, his friend Benjamin Hofer and Hofer's nephew Siame (Stasio) were all deported from the Warsaw ghetto, jumped out from the train which was taking them to a death camp and returned to Warsaw. Then Stas Hofer reminded himself of Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski, who "were doing business with his parents before the war." The Krzyczkowskis were the "last hope" of the five Jews. "They received a warm welcome, and Krzyczkowski agreed to hide them without asking for anything in return" – says the encyclopedia entry. Then comes the key sentence describing the attitude of the Poles towards the Jews they were hiding: "Despite the difficult financial situation and the risk they took, guided by compassion they took in the five refugees; they helped them, fed them and ensured their security." The Berland group was in hiding at the Krzyczkowskis' until the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising. Stasio Hofer was murdered by a National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne*, NSZ) detachment; the others survived.

2.

At the end of 1987 Marian Berland sent an application to Yad Vashem. On five pages of the manuscript Berland describes the circumstances of the escape from the transport to Majdanek; he writes about hiding together with other Jews at no. 41 Grzybowska Street, about the subsequent search for a new hiding place and about finding Zdzisław Krzyczkowski, who was living with his wife in a "post-Jewish" apartment at no. 42 Sienna Street in the former small ghetto. In his application Berland develops the post-war thread, completely absent from the encyclopedia entry.

¹ Czesław Krzyczkowski resident in the same Nasielsk, together with his mother Eugenia and sister Barbara (both deceased now) was awarded the Righteous among the Nations medal for rescuing two girls from the Warsaw ghetto. The decision was made on 10 February 1997. The Honorary Certificate is dated 31 March 1997. Mr Czesław was born in 1924 in the village of Krzyczki Pieniążki, 5 km from Nasielsk. He moved to Nasielsk in the 1990s. He has never heard about Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski and about the fact that they were awarded the Righteous among the Nations medal.

² Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski do not appear in Michał Grynberg's *Book of the Righteous*. The author did not include Poles awarded by Yad Vashem with the Righteous among the Nations titles in 1963–1989. The Krzyczkowskis' Certificate was issued in 1991.

"The Krzyczkowskis found us in Warsaw in 1946. We were trying to help them in different ways as much as we could. Usually financially." The Berlands left for Israel in 1956. They lost contact with the Krzyczkowskis. Only in 1986 did the Berlands find out about their "difficult financial situation." They were helping them by "sending parcels with different things on different occasions." At the end of 1987 Halina Krzyczkowska sent an "imploring letter with a request for help" to Israel. This letter made Marian Berland act. He sent in an application to Yad Vashem in which he "fervently asked for Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski to be recognized as people worthy of Your help, as people who in those terrible times risked their own lives and saved the lives of a few Jews destined to perish."

Marian Berland's application is of key importance for the case. For it was the basis for commencing the procedure of awarding the Krzyczkowskis with the Righteous title. Moreover, it activated the attempts at providing them with financial aid. From a strictly formal point of view it is worth mentioning that this procedure runs according to precisely specified rules, requires detailed data verification and comparison of witnesses' testimonies. Consequently, it sometimes drags on for a few years. But in the Krzyczkowskis' case it did not last longer than six months. Berland sent in the application to Yad Vashem in December 1987 (unfortunately it has no date but judging from its contents it must have been written several days after receiving Krzyczkowska's letter, which is dated 20 November 1988). At a session on 25 May 1988 the council decided to award the Krzyczkowskis with the 'Righteous among the Nations' medal. What is more, Halina Krzyczkowska's letter and Marian Berland's application are the only things in the Krzyczkowskis' file kept in the Yad Vashem Archives. It follows that the application was the sole basis for the council's decision.

Let us focus on the manner in which Berland depicts the Krzyczkowski married couple in his application to Yad Vashem.

At first - becoming acquainted. There is no mention of any "business" that the Krzyczkowskis allegedly did "before the war" with Staś Hofer's parents (as we can read in the encyclopedia entry from 2004). Zdzisław Krzyczkowski was a smuggler: he "sneaked" into the Warsaw ghetto, "bought shoes from Staś's father, which the latter produced, and then smuggled them to the Aryan side and for a while he earned a living in this way. This is how Staś (Siam) became acquainted with Zdzisław Krzyczkowski."

Secondly - who were the Krzyczkowskis? Berland does not write anything about that. It is as if the fifteen months he spent in their apartment did not compel him to make any reflections on the hosts. The testimony about hiding at no. 42 Sienna Street is extremely laconic. It opens with a sentence that could be treated either as a stereotypical formula or as an allusion to something that one cannot or does not want to write openly: "I can only say that we lived in horrible conditions." Then Berland somehow equates the situation of the five Jews to that of the two Poles. They were all poor and in danger of death: "We lived in poverty together with the Krzyczkowski family, who were as poor as we were. And they lived in constant awareness that hiding Jews was punished by the death penalty."

Thirdly – the general assessment of the Krzyczkowskis. Berland formulates it in a concise and unambiguous way: “Never, throughout the entire period did they give us reasons to fear that they would denounce us or throw us out on the street. We survived that horrible time only thanks to them and their help. . . . We have always been aware that we owe our lives to them and that it is our duty to show our gratitude for what they did for us.”

3.

Halina Krzyczkowska’s letter to the Berlands was written in Nasielsk on 20 November 1987. The Krzyczkowskis from the entry in the Righteous encyclopedia remain anonymous to us. We know only that the five Jews “received a warm welcome” and that the Poles were hiding them “without asking for anything in return.” As for the image of the Righteous-to-be, Berland’s application to Yad Vashem is equally undemonstrative. We find out about their “living in poverty” during the occupation and that almost forty years after the war “these people are old, helpless and ill and they are in a difficult financial situation.” However, it is Halina Krzyczkowska’s letter which brings a shocking image of the living conditions of the married couple from Nasielsk.

Because it is a truly unique document we decided to publish it by conducting a faithful transliteration so that the linguistic integrality of the letter remained intact. We are aware that this might make the text significantly difficult to read, as the orthography and style of the original severely tries our linguistic competence. Any “ironing-out” of the text, so as to make it more comprehensible, would contradict not only the basic rule of sources editing but would also destroy its basic message. For the value of the document stems from both its contents and the way these contents were written.

Halina Krzyczkowska desperately begs the Berlands for help. She directs her lament, her dramatic *de profundis*, from an upcountry town in northern Mazovia to distant Israel. She brings her old charges truly grievous news: an endless list of illnesses ailing her and her husband; galloping high prices, which push the married couple to the verge of indigence; a march of suffering, tragedies and death. All this is said in mumbling, flawed speech, as if the language itself, which Halina uses with difficulty, was afflicted with an incurable illness. Everything around is disintegrating, rotting, dying: the body and the speech.

4.

Marian Berland wrote twice about the Krzyczkowskis: for the first time while he was hiding in their apartment from mid-1943 until the outbreak of the Warsaw uprising in August 1944;³ for the second time, more than forty years later, in the

³ Marian Berland started writing down his memories in the Krzyczkowskis’ apartment, at the firm request of Basia Temkin-Bermanowa of the Jewish National Committee (ŻKN),

application to Yad Vashem. The reading of these two testimonies is shocking. Practically nothing from the memoirs written on the spot found its way into the text written in 1987. We are not talking about the obvious difference in form and length. The Krzyczkowskis' thread in the memoir is very developed. The application to Yad Vashem was confined to only five pages of manuscript and thus had to only summarize basic information. However, the difference in tone in which Berland talks about his rescuers is shocking. Zdzisio and Halinka (this is how they are called in the notes taken during the occupation) do not bear any resemblance whatsoever to Zdzisław and Halina from the text that activated the procedure of awarding them with the Righteous title.

Zdzisio and Halinka are a couple of lumpenproletarians from an annex on Sienna Street. They become carers of five Jews; the lot of those in hiding depends on them. The contrast between "the hosts" and "the guests" cannot be any sharper: the intellectual level, the mentality, the place in the social hierarchy, which the war completely shattered. The portrait of the Krzyczkowskis is drawn superbly. Berland writes in a biting fashion, although not without humor, is partial to irony, but is actually very understanding towards his heroes. He is an astute observer of everyday life; consequently, he notes down lots of highly interesting customary details. His depiction of mutual relations between Zdzisio and Halinka and between their charges is an excellent sketch to a psycho-sociological study of providing shelter and being in hiding in occupied Warsaw.

"Zdzisio is a young man about thirty, tall, handsome, slim. Light blond with deep blue eyes. . . . Halina - a couple years younger than Zdzisio, platinum blonde, much shorter than him, of average looks" - writes Berland. Both come from Nasielsk. They are "almost illiterate and only with great difficulty can they read a sentence in a newspaper and scrawl their signatures in capital letters." Before the war "Zdzisio frequently figured in police files. . . . The periods of time when he was out of prison could easily be likened to short holidays." His main occupation was luring "the gullible to play three-cards or thimbles, sometimes to play 'red wins, black loses.'" Zdzisio and Halina had known each other since childhood, and the passion of

which at some point in time took the Jews hiding at no. 42 Sienna into its care. He was writing in Polish. Fragments were published in *Przełom* ("Breakthrough" magazine), the press organ of the Poalej Syjon (Poale Zion) Zjednoczonej Żydowskiej Partii Robotniczej, which arose out of the merger of Poale Zion-Left and Poale Zion-Right, in the following issues: 3, 4-5 (1946); 6-7, 8-9 (1947); 20 (1949). None of the fragments concerned the hiding period at the Krzyczkowskis'. Two years after arriving in Israel, thanks to his friends' help, Marian Berland published his memoirs in Hebrew. In the Yad Vashem application from 1987 he stresses that, "the publication of my book was the aim of my life." Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza (NOWa) was the Polish publisher of Berland's memoirs. The book was published in 1992. The original title "Strach przed jutrem" ("The Fear of Tomorrow") was changed, with the late author's approval (he died on 17 February 1988) to *Dni długie jak wieki* (*Days as Long as Centuries*). The publisher stressed that, "it turned out to be necessary . . . to cut the original in a couple of places."

the married couple's quarrels expressed itself in the rhetoric characteristic of their circle: Halinka questioned "the conduct" of Zdzisio's mother, while he reminded her "at which fence or at which cemetery she afforded her charms to this or that heartbreaker of the women of Nasielsk." The outbreak of the war coincided with Zdzisio's release, so he "fled to Warsaw and decided to lead a life of a respectable man from then on. . . . He usually traded in Praga, at the Rozycki market. This was his base." At the end of this description Berland emphasizes that "Zdzisio is honorable in his own way; admittedly the honor is that of a thief, but he is nevertheless honorable and this means a lot. . . . Zdzisio firmly, with all determination, states that, "I have never been a stool pigeon and I never will be. You can butcher me up," he says, "into pieces and nobody will get anything out of me."

Financial considerations, such as paying for the stay at the Krzyczkowskis', settling food, the apartment's redecoration and furnishing expenses, financing the ideas which were to bring money to Zdzisio and which usually ended up with bankruptcy (rickshaw, trading home-made blood sausage and headcheese as well as moonshine at a bazaar), the Jews' attempts at finding financial means to live on – all this takes up a lot of space in Berland's memoirs. At the initial arrangement regarding the conditions of their stay in Sienna, the issue of paying for the stay was indisputable. "Of course we will pay him," stresses Berland, "and for sure he will not regret it." . . . It seems that Zdzisio came into contact with us by a stroke of luck. . . . The Krzyczkowskis already see themselves in a situation where they do not need to trouble themselves with and worry about finding means of supporting themselves. From now on they will eat until they are full, they will not starve, they will prepare the apartment and – first and foremost – they will not work. . . . We will pay five hundred zł[otys] a week, a kind of rent, apart from that we will pay for the materials needed to prepare the hiding place and the apartment for our arrival." The application to Yad Vashem from 1987 does not mention any of this.

Berland follows the metamorphosis of his hosts from the point of view of both an expert psychologist and satirist. The money that regularly supplies home funds allows them to gradually but systematically improve their standard of living. Better and better food, more and more elegant clothes, higher and higher aspirations, bigger and bigger temptations to make a profit, and more and more unrealistic plans for setting up new businesses. At the same time more and more vodka drinking, violent matrimonial quarrels and passionate reconciliations. The money issue is one of the main threads of the story about the Krzyczkowskis. For the world of Zdzisio and Halinka revolves around money. The Jews who are hiding at their place are perfectly aware of this. They are in a state of "small cold psychological war" with Zdzisio, as Berland put it. They cannot reveal that he is their "last resort" so that they do not become totally dependent on him. They are extremely distrustful, they do not reveal the sources or the amount of their financial means. Nevertheless, they do give in to their hosts' growing appetites, knowing that by doing this they are saving their lives. After some time Zdzisio himself formulated such a rule while making new financial demands: "The Jews need to pay for their lives."

In his application from 1987 Berland stresses that the Krzyczkowskis "never, throughout the entire period, gave us reasons to fear that they would denounce us or throw us out on the street." Apparently after forty years he remembered the scenes that took place at no. 42 Sienna Street differently. In the memoirs written on the spot he gives examples not only of Halina's frauds ("For months she has been shamelessly cheating us and robbing us by buying less produce") but also writes about her grumbling about the inconvenience caused by the tenants and about her prevailing upon Zdzisio to get rid of them. "We are extremely distressed and frustrated from fear... Both Zdzisio and Halina make it impossible for us to have a moment of peace and rest... The only remedy, the only way to buy a few moments of peace... is to keep the purse constantly open, to continually reach inside and endlessly give, give, pay for each breath... Neither Zdzisio nor Halina will let us stay at their place free of charge, even if we are hungry, even if only for one hour." The Krzyczkowskis frequently blackmailed the Jews they were giving shelter to, threatening to sell the apartment and leave them inside of it.

The most shocking scene was that of the body search conducted on all five Jews who were in hiding. Rubbing Zdzisio's nose in the fact that while others get rich thanks to "keeping Jews," he does not make any profit out of this, Halina scolds him: "You ass, you let them take you in, they are duping you however they want to. They are stuffed with money... Let's search them and you'll find all the dough. We must search them." The Krzyczkowskis diligently search their charges but they do not find what they intended to find - "the great fortune."

The farewell with the Krzyczkowskis has symbolic significance. The scene is absent from the application from 1987. Of course it is also not in the encyclopedia article from 2004. The Warsaw Uprising has just started. Fighting is taking place in the city. After fifteen months of hiding, Marian Berland and his companions in distress leave the apartment on Sienna Street. Zdzisio bids them farewell by saying: "If you're gonna leave then I won't let you into the apartment any more. You won't come into the apartment any more. I don't want people laughing at me for hiding Jews at my place."

Marian Berland's Letter to Yad Vashem, 1987

What I want to tell about here takes place in Warsaw at the beginning of June 1943 in the former Warsaw ghetto, which was abandoned by the Jews who, just a few months before, had been driven out, deported by force and burnt alive in the Treblinkas and Majdaneks and other similar places, which are so intricately woven together with the fate of the Jews of Warsaw and Poland.

As I said, it is the beginning of June 1943. A month before, I, my wife, my sister, my friend Benjamin Hoffer and his nephew Stasio Hofer (Siame), a 14-year-old boy - all of us managed to jump out and escape from the rushing train, which was taking us straight from the burning ghetto in Warsaw, through the Umschlagplatz, to one of the death camps in the east, maybe to Treblinka, maybe to Majdanek. (It seems to me

that the train was going to Majdanek near Lublin.) As I said, we managed to escape at night from the rushing train. (My father was shot when he looked out of the small window on top of the train, by a Ukrainian who was on guard on the freight car's roof.) My mother and the rest of our family were taken by train to their deaths.

After many adventures, next to which many movies full of tension are only an idyll, and thanks to an even greater stroke of luck, which we were enjoying then, we managed to get back to Warsaw after hiding in small woods and coppices for a few days.

In Warsaw, on the Aryan side, we met in a hiding place which had been prepared and organized by our acquaintances and friends before the uprising and before the Warsaw ghetto was burnt down.

This hiding place in the apartment was located in Warsaw in the area of the Small Ghetto at no. 4 Grzybowska Street. The Bromberg family bought this apartment with some help from a couple of Poles who were not even officially married. They were supposed to live there and give shelter to the Jews who were there, of course in return for adequate payment.

In the hiding place there were already 27 people packed into a dozen or so square meters. This venture was doomed to failure, mostly because so many people were hiding there. After a month of hiding in these truly inhumane conditions, the hiding place was "burnt" (exposed) and all of us Jews had to leave it in panic and escape. The Polish couple simply left us to ourselves and never returned to the apartment.

The Jews who were hiding there and who did not manage to find another place had only one option - to surrender to the Germans.

After many adventures and lucky coincidences, about which I will not write here, we found a place with Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski, who lived in a post-Jewish apartment at no. 42 Sienna Street in Warsaw, also in the small ghetto. The Krzyczkowskis took in me, my wife, my sister Teosia, Benjamin Hofer and Staś (Siam) Hofer. Zdzisław Krzyczkowski was a smuggler: he "sneaked" into the Warsaw ghetto, "bought shoes from Staś's father, which the latter produced, and then smuggled them to the Aryan side and for a while he earned a living in this way. This is how Staś (Siam) became acquainted with Zdzisław Krzyczkowski. The paths and fortunes of people are indeed fathomless. From June 1943 until the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising on 1 August 1944 we were hiding at the Krzyczkowskis' apartment in Warsaw at no. 42 Sienna Street - 15 months.

There were five of us Jews. I can only say that we lived in horrible conditions. We lived in poverty together with the Krzyczkowski family, who were as poor as we were. And they lived in constant awareness that hiding Jews was punished by the death penalty. Never, throughout the entire period, did they give us reasons to fear that they would denounce us or throw us out on the street. We survived this horrible time only thanks to them and their help. One needs to bear in mind that at that time it was almost impossible to find a shelter for just one Jew even for an hour, let alone for 15 months and for five Jews. We managed to survive the war only thanks to the Krzyczkowskis.

I would also like to stress that nobody from the hiding place at no. 41 Grzybowska Street survived the war. Some of those Jews in hiding went to the Hotel Polski and then were executed in Rembertow near Warsaw. Others, like the Bromberg family, Goldberg and others who had nowhere to escape to and nowhere to seek shelter, simply stayed in the apartment until the Germans came and took them from there. . . . The Krzyczkowskis found us as late as after the war in Warsaw in 1946. Just like us they were then in a very difficult situation.

But before that I would like to describe the fate of the five of us.

My sister died of a severe case of tuberculosis, of exhaustion and because of a complete lack of help not long before the outbreak of the uprising.

Stasio (Siame) Hofer was murdered (shot) with premeditation during the uprising in an anti-tank trench in Warsaw on Komitetowa Avenue. The insurgents from NSZ (NAF) killed him during the first days of the uprising only because he was a Jew and was not even able to walk. After 15 months of sitting in a small hiding place in the Krzyczkowskis' apartment his legs simply could not carry him.

I, my wife and Benjamin Hofer survived. The Krzyczkowskis found us in Warsaw in 1946. We were trying to help them in different ways as much as we could. Usually financially. We have always been aware that we owe our lives to them and that it is our duty to show our gratitude for what they did for us. For the fact that they risked their lives to save us.

We and the Krzyczkowskis went our separate ways again. After many years of refusing to do it, in 1956 we left Warsaw and went to Israel. Me, my wife and Benjamin Hofer. Only us three. All the others stayed there.

After our arrival in Israel, thanks to our friends' help, Yad Vashem published my book written in the Krzyczkowskis' apartment. It depicted the last days of the Warsaw Ghetto, strictly speaking the uprising in the Warsaw Ghetto. The book is titled *Dni długie jak wieki (Days as Long as Centuries)*. At that time the publication of my book was the aim of my life.

Precisely twenty years after that, that is on 18 April 1963, Benjamin Hofer's life ended; he died of cancer and is buried in Tel-Aviv.

Our contact with the Krzyczkowskis was on and off for many years. As late as two years ago, when we found out that they were in a difficult financial situation, we were trying to help them by sending parcels with different things on different occasions. It turned out that this aid was very much in time. But unfortunately it was insufficient.

A couple of days ago we received an imploring letter from Krzyczkowska, who was begging us for help. These people are old, helpless and sick and they live in a difficult financial situation in Nasielsk – a small provincial town. We will certainly send them some parcels again but this is insufficient and does not do justice for what they did for us.

We have recently found out that they could be helped by the Jewish Organization, which was set up for such purposes. Therefore, we fervently ask for Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski to be recognized as people worthy of Your help, as people

who in those terrible times risked their own lives and saved the lives of a few Jews destined to perish. Which would have certainly happened if it had not been for these two people's help.

Halina Krzyczkowska's Letter to Marian Berland from 20 November 1987

Beloved Mr and Mrs Berland I donot know why you donot write tous at all dont you wantto exchange letters withus I donot know whatas happened withyou if you donot replay tothis letter then I willnot write toyou anymor we ar sick Zdzisiek and me I had a strok on 5 may 87 its summer and I feel bad every three days I goto the doctor and a nurse comes to the house and hasbeen givin me pickmeup shots for a coupleof months every day andnow I has a cold and I has bronchitis and I caught a cold during this bronchitis and I got flu that I canot getout fromthis illnes and the doctor says that I'll have a 2 heart attack this is how the doctors cheerd meup me back aches and side and chest it was like that that I had chest and back peins 2 times such attacks if not atdaytime then at five I had horrible peins afterthis streptomycyna it was likethis for 2 weeks every dey no pein killers did not help me I was lying for a month I did not walk and now Zdzisiek has flu he has thinneddown and I thinned-down and weare flaggin clearly the old age is on me we canot eat doesnot have appetite atall apples got frozen and are expensiv 350 zloty akilo thereare nolemons at all when there were some they cost 600 zl akilo and everythin more expensiv every 2 weeks the price is diferent and in the new year everythin is suposed to be even mor expensiv thereis no tee only jasmin leeves and flowers are good but theyare rarely some its good but you need to catch it and Im lying so I donot walk so wholl buy this forme and inform me when it is there write back I donot not want fromyou but its hard for me to liv onone pension only me pension if not 11 thousand 200 zl [two illegible words] he still does his shoes fellapart water iscoming in he walks in rubberboots ithas been rainin for thewhole summer and autum I donot want to live with that rain its rainin and rainin all thetime people couldnot harvest the fields the havest was only in September there were afew days of break and they were dryin-gup thecrops in dryingrooms crops the bread is black and uneatable its nogood only for hens pigs what a summer there was the harvest and frost in september like never before there hasnever been ayear like thissummer Zdzisiek wears shoes size 11 the biggest Im waiting for a letter Iam sendin gretings for Mrs Marja and Mr Marjan Berlant fromus and children and Grandchildren one boy is 13 the girl is 14 years old the middle one doesnot have children atall this granson with mustaches was badly beaten upand they gouged hiseyes andnow they killed him and hanged him on the posts at [acouple of illegible words] the dead daughter lies in Bródno with me Mother together in one cavern and with me motherinlaw and theres only one place for the soninlaw people here die and there are 3-4 funerals aday in the street they die of strokes and heart attacks and paralis is not much worse than cancer because they arewalkin in the street and they die and a stroke and paralis is like Aunt 86 years old and she died ofthat athome Grandson was 22 years old was

comin back from his girlfriend he went 400 meters and it happened nobody knows who and what happened withhim Im finishin this leter and Im sending my greetings to both of You see you.

The Diary of Marian Berland Written while He Was Hiding at the Krzyczkowskis'

The journey to Sienna is proceeding without any adventures. We went on foot, it was quite a long way but today I was much less tired than the first time I went this way. My wounded legs have rested a bit and the shoes are not pinching so much. We enter Zdzisio's house from Śliska, through a hall. The tenement overlooks two parallel streets - Sienna and Śliska. The hall through which we enter is also the front entrance to the Krzyczkowskis' apartment. So the apartment has two entrances: the front and the kitchen one. In my case it is very handy, if only because the neighbor cannot see from her balcony that a strange man has come into Zdzisio's apartment. It will be better if I enter the apartment from behind, unseen by anybody. Marysia goes upstairs through the kitchen entrance, which is now used by everybody, and I am waiting in the staircase on the fourth floor. After a couple of minutes I hear the key scratching in the lock and a tall man in blue, stained overalls opens the door for me. It is Zdzisio himself.

I entered immediately and fell into the arms of little Staś, who was as happy as if he had not seen me for years. The boy was so happy that he almost cried. First of all he asks about his uncle. I calm him down. Hoffer is fine, he is safe and sound. In a dozen or so days he will move in with us when the hiding place is more or less prepared. Of course Halina is in the apartment too. Stasio does not fail to introduce me.

And at last we have new carers. What will they turn out to be like, how will it be to live here? God only knows. A new stage of our path to survival is beginning. A new era is beginning in our life. The era of Zdzisław and Halina Krzyczkowski.

Zdzisio is a young man about thirty, tall, handsome, slim. Light blond with deep blue eyes. When he laughs one can see two fake teeth inserted up front and made of white metal. Halina - a couple of years younger than Zdzisio, platinum blonde, much shorter than him, of average looks. Both look like average Poles. Zdzisio, just like Halina, was born in Nasielsk, a few dozen kilometers north of Warsaw. Nasielsk is a small town and undoubtedly a hole where everybody knows everybody and everybody knows everything about everybody. Neither Zdzisio nor Halina ever sullied their reputation by spending even one day in any kind of school. I do not know whose fault it is, but it is a fact that both are almost illiterate and only with great difficulty can they read a sentence in a newspaper and scrawl their signatures in capital letters. Zdzisio's father has been dead for many years. His mother, just like Halina's mother, still lives in Nasielsk. One of Zdzisio's brothers painted rooms for a living and Zdzisio was helping him with the workload for some time. This is why he claims to be a painter and an artist.

Before the war Zdzisio frequently figured in police files. After the Germans had entered Nasielsk he preferred to get out of their face and voluntarily emigrated to Warsaw. Even before the war he was not a keen enthusiast of hearth and home. His father's teachings aimed at making him an honest, decent man did not conquer his fondness of travelling, rambling and easy, dishonest ways of getting money. Adolescent Zdzisio, who should rather be sitting at a school desk and learning how to write, acquired a taste for roaming by trains, under seats, in restrooms, on roofs, in freight cars, in short – dodging the fare. Because of this cheap way of getting to know the world, the well-earned nickname “Dodge-farer,” invented by his friends, stuck to him. It was then that he got acquainted with the police for the first time. For now he got acquainted with police stations and low-security penitentiaries scattered in a wide radius from Nasielsk. Zdzisio did not miss an opportunity to nick something during these free trips. A package, briefcase or wallet of a sleeping person or an absent-minded traveler was too great a temptation. Because he did not have much luck at these excesses, his times inside were becoming longer and longer and in more and more secure penitentiaries. The periods of time when he was out of prison could easily be likened to short holidays. In the end, living on the state's board and lodging palled on him; he decided to settle down and start living honestly. To earn a crust by working. But what did it look like?

Zdzisio is gifted, one must admit, and he has incredibly adroit fingers. Unfortunately, he did not use these gifts to play the piano. In a neighboring small town, during a fair or church fete, Zdzisio was luring the gullible to play three-cards or thimbles, sometimes to play ‘red wins, black loses.’ And in this way, with a band of solicitors he was winning money from smart alecs from some dump. Unfortunately, Zdzisio's “honest” conduct also did not command understanding and recognition from the ubiquitous police and undercover agents. A couple of times he managed to pack the casino up and to disappear. But eventually he served a serious time. The end of this instance of his using the state's lodgings coincided with the outbreak of the war. The Germans cracked down on professionals like Zdzisio much more deftly than the Polish authorities did; they just finished them off, usually without the help of a court and without a sentence or, in the best case scenario, they transported them to a concentration camp. So Zdzisio fled to Warsaw and decided to lead the life of a respectable man from then on.

In Warsaw, during the first period of the war Zdzisio was loafing about at bazaars. He traded a little, very often trading things that did not part from their owners by means of a usual transaction. He usually traded in Praga, at the Różycki market. This was his base. This trading was not very lucrative and Zdzisio and Halina lived in some degree of poverty. But times have changed for better. Here comes the time of harvest. The Germans created a ghetto in Warsaw and closed half a million Jews within its walls. Now everything that one buys on the Aryan side can be transferred or smuggled to the ghetto and one can make a big profit out of it. The difference in prices is quite substantial. One needs to take some risks but this is nothing new to Zdzisio. And until the time of great deportations the trade was going fine and

Zdzisio was doing fine. He usually got into the ghetto in the evening, with a group of Jewish workers who were coming back from work on the Aryan side. He slept in the ghetto at his acquaintances', and in the daytime he put on his sleeve a white armband with an embroidered star of David. With such a decoration he could move about without anybody bugging him. In the evening he managed to carry a rucksack filled with food, past the guard post [*wacha*] and into the ghetto. He resold the food to his regular customers (at whose place he used to sleep), in this case to Staś's parents. Once before, by accident, he stopped Staś in the street in the ghetto and asked him if he knew where it was possible to buy some shoes. A coincidence. Stasio took him straight to his father, who was earning a living by making shoes. This was the beginning of this strange acquaintance.

For a long time, until mid-1942, Zdzisio sneaked into the ghetto a couple of times a week, brought rucksackfuls of food to Staś's parents and in return carried out a few, sometimes a dozen or so, pairs of shoes. With the beginning of the deportations Staś lost contact with Zdzisio. Then the boy's parents were deported and died in the death camps. Stasio survived the deportations hidden in some hole and then moved in with his uncle, Hoffer. Zdzisio could not get into the last ghetto; besides, it was not worth poking his nose there. The trade ceased. Consequently Zdzisio began to live in poverty again. The years of plenty have ended.

Zdzisio had known Halina since childhood. At the time when he was running his casinos at the fairs, Halina was actively helping him to run the business. The success of the enterprise depended to a large extent on her. Apart from these pursuits her life was not free of other offenses of a greater caliber, in which nowadays Zdzisio rubs her nose all the time.

There are many opportunities, even too many, and nobody spares anybody.

The married couple orders each other's relatives around with great pleasure. For her the most pleasant caress is when she can call into question Zdzisio's not very proper origins and challenge his mother's conduct. In reply, Zdzisio deigns to remind Halina at which fence or at which cemetery she afforded her charms to this or that heartbreaker of the women of Nasielsk. Apart from these lovely incidents everything is fine, the spouses are agreeable and generally speaking they suit each other.

In closing, one thing needs to be strongly emphasized. Zdzisio is honorable in his own way; admittedly the honor is that of a thief, but he is nevertheless honorable and this means a lot. It might seem that he is a man without character, but he is not. Zdzisio firmly, with all determination, states, "I have never been a stool pigeon and I never will be. You can butcher me up," he says, "into pieces and nobody will get anything out of me."

For us the last remark is important, everything else does not have any significance now whatsoever. Just some chats over a glass of moonshine.

...

We sleep on the floor, on bare boards. We have no bedding, nothing to put underneath ourselves, nothing to cover ourselves with. It is warm during the day but at night it is a bit cool and we get cold. While escaping from Grzybowska with Hoffer and Leosia, at the very last moment, Marysia managed to take my trousers and a jacket – the things in which I had escaped from the car. This clothing is very useful for me now. I would not have anything to wear at home and when I am working at the bricks. It would be a pity to wear out my navy blue suit and I spare it as much as I can. This is my only clothing in which I can go outside, when the need arises.

Marysia came back only the next day. In Żoliborz everything is fine. Hoffer and Leosia are healthy and would like to come to us as soon as possible. Hoffer has grown so close to Stas that the latter will not be happy at all when he loses a buddy to drink with. Even Cesia has been mollified and does not insist on Hoffer and Leosia getting out. However, Hoffer is not happy about the sweet life at Stasio's. He assumes that we cannot afford any luxuries and at the same time pay for and prepare the hiding place at Zdzisio's. We cannot run two households for long. The expenses are vast, they simply terrify us and make us almost panic. We need to end this as fast as possible. Thus we need Hoffer and Leosia to come sooner, we cannot wait until the hiding place is entirely finished. We need to talk to Zdzisio and set up a date. As for rescuing the Brombergs, Hoffer is wholeheartedly for it. Who will go to Grzybowska to spy out the land? For Marysia it is too big a risk.

As it turns out, only this evening Cichocki brought Hoffer the money – the equivalent of one hundred dollars which Marysia had left with him a couple of days ago. Reportedly he could not do it earlier. He came to Staś just when Marysia was there. Cichocki knows Bromberg very well. Hoffer managed to convince him to go, even if only out of pity, to Grzybowska and find out with Adolek, the janitor, what was happening there. Cichocki swore that he would drop in there the next day after work and that he would let Hoffer know as to the outcome of the visit. In turn Marysia is supposed to go again to Żoliborz in two days to find out about Cichocki's visit and at the same time to inform Hoffer about the date of his moving to Sienna.

Marysia brought some money with her. We shared it with Zdzisio and paid him the weekly fee we owed him. She also brought from old Staś quite a big piece of cured meat for little Staś.

Since the first day here we have been running our separate household, and we have been doing it in as modest a fashion as possible. Brown bread with margarine and coffee without milk and sweetened with saccharin for breakfast. Some soup with a few potatoes and noodles for dinner. Soup with a bit of overfried fatback. Sparsely scattered cracklings float on the soup's surface. For supper also bread and coffee. For now Marysia is cooking both the soup and water for coffee on Halina's cooker. Thanks to the wages they get, the Krzyczkowskis eat much better food than before. Halina can afford to buy meat and cured meat. Hence, for now they are very happy with the deal that they have struck with us. We do not complain either. We cannot reproach them with anything. Zdzisio, who had been idly hanging around, fiddle-faddling or lounging about on the sack for days on end, has an occupation now and

works with pleasure. Before now he simply could not think of anything he could do for a living without having to take pains. Now he is on the right track. He is dabbling at something forbidden, against "the law," and he is making a profit. Halina has also come back to life, she can go shopping and she has money for it. First and foremost, she can eat until she is full and she has not experienced this feeling often before.

Worked up, not squeezed in some cellar with a big group of other worn-out, terrified Jews, for now we are feeling better than before. It seems that we are less depressed, calmer. In the company of almost simpletons we feel less overwhelmed and we feel less of the humiliation into which we had sunk before. Hence, for now we like it here. Little Stasio is happy that he came in handy and that thanks to his acquaintances we have found such good lodgings at such a critical moment.

The preparations for the construction of the hiding place are proceeding intensely. Zdzisio is gathering more and more bricks and sand. He and Halina are tirelessly gathering the materials. The whole room is swamped with bricks, he even managed to prepare some lime. This grind took its toll on Halina, she is complaining that she has had enough, that she is exhausted from carrying bricks, that she has no power left and that they have certainly gathered enough already. And Zdzisio keeps saying that they need more.

"Gather," he says. "Don't try to be so smart until I tell you it's enough. I know better how many bricks and much sand we need."

We do not interfere so as not to annoy her even more.

If one of us could go down into the courtyard, he would be happy to do it. But the whole thing is that nobody should see us. Still, gathering materials is drawing to a close. According to some rough calculations, we do not need much more. Zdzisio, who authoritatively supervises the whole job, states that the moment when we gather enough material he is going to brick the front door up, and only after that will he start erecting the wall in the room. He wants Hoffer and Leosia to move here from Żoliborz one or two days before that. The point is to bring them to the apartment through this entrance. It is entirely right and reasonable.

The two days since Marysia's last stay in Żoliborz passed in a flash and it is right for her to go there again. We need to frequently sustain this contact if only until the time when we are all together. Later on we could cut back on the journeys to the city. Zdzisio is already beginning to show his discontent, so does Halina. He would like to lock us up and isolate us from the outside world. We fully agree on this strict rigor in this respect. None of us intends to roam about in the city without any need for that, let alone leaving the apartment, which is the safest place, in order to get some fresh air or to go for a walk. Right now we do not yearn for anything but an opportunity to stay peacefully in hiding. But we need to stay in contact with the city, with people from the outside. At least Marysia needs to leave the apartment in order to escort Leosia and Hoffer. Later on we will have to see Cichocki once in a while in connection with money exchange.

We also plan to try to find additional sources of financial means needed to support ourselves, but we will leave that for later. And then it is also only Marysia who

can go to the city with this end in mind. We do not know how the Brombergs' case will turn out. If one of them decides to hide with us, then only Marysia can escort him here. So we cannot agree to a situation where we all sit locked up here without a possibility to communicate with the world. We also cannot let it happen for the Krzyczkowskis to start thinking that we have all our financial means here with us. Zdzisio must be convinced that each time we get money from the outside. We do not trust anybody and our lives and the opportunity to hide at their place might depend on our convincing the Krzyczkowskis about this. So already now, at the very beginning, we have decided to secure for the future the opportunity for Marysia to leave the apartment and to get Zdzisio's permission in advance. We need to convince him that if Marysia cannot go out we will not have money to pay for our stay here and that nobody else can find or get to people upon whom we are supposedly dependent. Zdzisio replies to our arguments, "I don't want her to bring the Gestapo over here because of her roaming about."

We answer that we want to avoid it even more than he does and hence we will try with all our might to reduce these trips to the necessary minimum. So far we have decided upon that. So tomorrow Marysia will go to Żoliborz again. I have decided that she will escort Leosia in a few days, and Hoffer a week later. It is too difficult to escort them together through the whole city and to smuggle them upstairs to the apartment. The risk is too great, we cannot exaggerate.

Today Zdzisio went outside to make sure that it was safe in the street. After a dozen or so minutes, he came back, let Marysia go through the front door and personally escorted her round the corner of the nearest street.

From the very beginning we are in a state of small psychological cold war with Zdzisio. In no way whatsoever can we let him know that he is our last resort. We pretend to be important as if we were being sought after by many acquaintances from the city, to say the least. We direct conversations in such a way that it follows that we could be somewhere in Żoliborz, Targówek or in Wola. We do all this to create an impression that we are not so lonely or hopeless, and perhaps to get humane treatment, too. So as not to, at the very beginning, fall into moral captivity and oppression which we experienced a couple of months ago at Błażyński's. We wish not to let our full dependence turn Zdzisio's head.

Marysia returned the same evening. We immediately spotted that something was wrong. She is distressed, depressed and is close to having a psychological breakdown. We got scared.

- "In Żoliborz everything is fine," she calmed us down.

When Zdzisio asks about what the people who were to join us have decided, she announces that they have found a different place and that for now they have decided not to come here. Only when we lay down in bed and when the door of Zdzisio and Halina's room was shut did Marysia tell us what has happened with the Brombergs.

Cichocki, just as he promised, went to the janitor in Grzybowska to ask if the latter could make it easier for him to speak with Bromberg. At first, the janitor looked

strangely at him and then, after a long reflection, he coldly, disgustingly and bluntly said,

"They are not here any more; the blue police took all of them a couple of days ago, for sure to Szucha [Avenue]. And you?" he asks, "What do you care? Do you know them?"

"No, I just wanted to talk to the sheet-metal worker, to get the money he owes me for the food I once gave him." Cichocki managed to skillfully shift the conversation onto the right track.

"So you will not get your money back from them. You will find them as bars of soap lying on a shelf at Majde's."

Cichocki assented to something more and managed to make off as fast as he could.

"I was happy," he says, "when I was far away from Grzybowska."

"Do you ever see Jozek Zalewski in the workshop?" asks Hoffer.

"No," answers Cichocki. "It is strange, nobody knows where he is. He has not been at work for a few days." That night we did not sleep a wink. Marysia is trying to refrain from crying. Sorrow and doubts sneaked into our hearts, which had been full of hope.

However, when we reflect deeper on the whole issue, we arrive at the conclusion that something is wrong here. Nobody can save the Brombergs now, but something is wrong. Usually the gendarmerie and the Gestapo, equipped with trucks, with cabs, with all the accessories, with all the crackle, take part in such an action. But here, just like that, the blue police simply raked them out. After all, they do not take up such serious actions voluntarily. To catch one person on the street, to help the Germans during an action – this they can do. But voluntary participation in a more serious brawl? We cannot believe it. There is something wrong. It smells of some major dirty trick.

A few months after these events, when the tragedy on Grzybowska had long been forgotten, Joziek came back to work in Kozikowski's workshops. Cichocki used the chance to ask him about the topic. Joziek gave him to understand that the house owner, together with the janitor, wanted to get rid of the inconvenient and abandoned Jewish tenants at any cost. They contrived this dirty trick. They cared about not establishing any closer contact with the Germans as much as they cared about their own lives. So they arranged the whole affair together with the constable, with whom they were in league. It seems to us now that this logical unraveling of the mystery which has been plaguing us does not depart from truth.

The tragedy of the Brombergs introduced some confusion into our plans. We are slightly veering off from the course for the nearest future that we set for ourselves. We have been roused from a state of bliss, into which we have recently fallen, as if by a sobering, powerful blow between the eyes. Their tragedy has sobered us up and restored us to a not so cheerful reality.

The complete move from Żoliborz will have to be slightly postponed. We will not escort Leosia until next week. She misses me and Marysia a lot, so she should

be here with us. In turn Hoffer will stay at Staś's even longer, at least for another month. We are explaining this by the fact that Staś really wants Hoffer to stay at his place for a bit longer. He is almost embittered when he hears that Hoffer is to leave him soon. We want neither to leave a bad impression of ourselves in Żoliborz, nor to slam the door of opportunity behind ourselves. This delay will do further damage to our finances, but we need to accept it. So thinks Hoffer.

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Even Zdzisio, who is an ordinary Warsaw skeptic and thinks of himself, "I'm the Lord, I'm smarter than Christ himself," even he, Zdzisio, is impressed by the prayers of the Jew who turns to Zdzisio for help and is at his mercy. Zdzisio reminded himself that his elderly mother, who lives in Nasielsk, still prays in church every day. He takes pride at having a decent mother, who is a believer. Even Halina, who contrary to Zdzisio is a believer, but whose faith is superstitious, primitive and ignorant, constantly threatens her husband, "You'll see, you son-of-a-bitch, that cos of your mug, your barking, cos of your blaspheming, you'll choke on your own tongue."

Whereas the rest of her faith, and her knowledge of it, is reduced to an obligation to kiss the priest on the hand (it makes her most furious when Zdzisio rubs her nose in this pleasure), to various miracles, crying and laughing paintings, bleeding statues, etc. Even she is not as daring towards Hoffer as she is towards us, and she never gets involved in major chats with him. She respects him more than any one of us.

We can already predict that living with Halina will not be easy, and that she will cause us trouble. Her whole personality, all traits of her character, when examined more closely, will incline even an optimist to feel sullen. Both spouses are characterized by almost equal lack of basic knowledge. Since they were both kids, they have derived their life philosophy from the street, never within principles and decency, but always from the outside, from the margin. Nevertheless, Zdzisio is far superior to his spouse. One could draw an apt comparison by comparing him to an eagle and her to a magpie.

Frequent failures in his life, constant struggle in which he has always been the game, taught Zdzisio to resign and drove him into abnegation. At fairs, at Warsaw bazaars, under benches and on the roofs of cars, he has internalized some rules which, to his mind, should be followed. He made them his life code. Despite his smartass way of speaking, Zdzisio possesses intelligence unique to him, and even some degree of wit and humor, which is especially visible when he banters with Halina. He is shyer, less pesky, less grumpy and more decent towards us than she is. As if he has not forgotten yet how a wanted man feels.

By contrast, Halina is a total moron, as if covered with a garish cloth on the outside, whereas on the inside she is an apple rotten to the core. She has no decency, no rules, no spiritual values. Underneath the wave of golden hair and the low forehead there is a birdbrain. It is dark inside of it; no ray of light penetrates it. It swirls with low thoughts and breeds only low deeds. No sign of intelligence, wit, humor. These things are not her cup of tea. She cannot discern derision, even of a heavy caliber,

from the truth. While in the cradle, she must have sucked all possible bad inclinations with her mother's milk.

She was also brought up on the streets, but not on the streets of Warsaw, which are full of smartness and dash; not on those streets, which were characterized by a higher form of life – the life of a big city. The streets of Warsaw give some refinement, sophistication, finesse and elegance even to their ladies of the night. Halina is merely a product of the dark alleys of a small provincial shithole. In the best case scenario, she enjoyed the pale light of the moon, instead of multicolored neon lights. Not infrequently, the silence of cemeteries served as the background for her romantic adventures. So it is no surprise that she is the way she is; and she is so vulgar that it fills one with revulsion.

An inexhaustible lexicon of filthy abuse and swearwords, but an artless one, without any polish, is showered onto Zdzisio's head during more and more frequent arguments between the spouses. Halina's key rule is to lie, no matter if there is a need for it or not. In all circumstances and in each case it is better to lie than to tell the truth. She will cheat, wherever and however she can. The way she eats or dresses does not let one spot even a dash of polish, which one could nibble at even at Nasielsk. One cannot find even a dash of tenderness, feminine fragility, some degree of bashfulness, of the specific fluid which every girl that has her post at the gate on Chmielna is not devoid of. All day long, Halina can sport linen, long and soiled panties in the apartment, in front of us – entirely strange people. In short – a slut. Maybe she wants to provoke and allure Zdzisio with this plain undress. It is a kind of striptease. Nevertheless, it sometimes has the opposite effect. Namely, one time Zdzisio simply did not appreciate his spouse's efforts and it was as if he threw a bucket of cold water on her.

"You bitch," he says, "you could put something on, and not hang about the apartment for the whole day like a moth, half-naked."

"What?" Halina pays him back, "You don't like my ass? You son-of-a-bitch, go and find a different one. I won't pine for you. You see him? What a gentleman, an intellectual he's become. Were you so smart in Nasielsk? Your mother has trained you like this. You don't like me, then you shouldn't have taken me. I wouldn't die a spinster."

Zdzisio says only parenthetically that when he was taking her she was no maiden any more. Right after that, to cut the conversation, he says, "Shut up, you bitch, cos if I punch you in the face, you'll choke on your own teeth."

Apparently, the threat worked, because Halina retreated, mumbling something, into more distant areas of the apartment, to the distant kitchen. It is tranquil for now. These were just some social chats.

We sleep on the bare floor, on hard boards. When we get up in the morning, we cannot stretch our bones, all our bones ache. We are literally barefoot, naked and ragged. We have neither underwear nor linen. We have found at Staś's, or maybe we have gotten from him, two or three used shirts and two towels. These are almost the only items of clothing we have. We are so poor as never before in our lives.

The rest of the things which we managed to salvage from the ghetto were lost on Grzybowska. What especially gets on top of us is the lack of linen and covering. Sometimes, on cooler nights, we cuddle up to each other like cold puppies that want to warm each other up. I did not recover any of the things that my father deposited in the basement of the Kozikowskis' workshops (I know that sacks with bedclothes were there). I counted on getting the bedclothes back. I would have never thought that they would refuse to give them back at my request. The Kozikowskis are extremely rich; they have never been tempted by bites so small, so mean. Nor would I have ever thought that they would behave as rudely as in this case. After all, their fortune has sprung up from the ghetto, and we worked for them for years without payment. In other circumstances and at some other time I would not care much about losing a few pillows and duvets, but now when we are so poor, so hopeless, so abandoned, the criminal attitude of Stanisław Kozikowski was an unexpected shock and blow to us. We could not recover from it for a long time. We finally managed to convince Cichocki, who resisted more than ever, to turn to Stanislaw on our behalf and to ask him to return the bedclothes. Cichocki, in accordance with the truth, told Kozikowski that we were lying and sleeping on bare boards, that we were cold at night and short on food, and that we had nothing to cover ourselves with. In reply, the latter scolded Cichocki extremely rudely.

"What? Has your life lost value for you?" he asked, "Are you looking for trouble? Have we not had enough of Jews already? You had better take care of your own business and your own head; and do not come to me again with such business." Cichocki went away with a flea in his ear.

"I do not want to have anything to do with this scoundrel," he says, "not for love or money."

By no means can we afford to buy even the cheapest things now. First of all, everything is extremely expensive nowadays. The ghetto is over now, and it was an inexhaustible stock, out of which industrial commodities were constantly flowing onto the Aryan side. Nowadays, for instance, one can buy clothes and bedclothes only at bazaars, and at profiteering prices. We use each grosz that we have to pay our hosts and to buy a loaf of brown bread and a couple of potatoes, which we need in order to live through another day. Who in such circumstances would think of wasting the last, bloodstained, salvaged grosz on duvets or other rags?

In September we embarked on a major mission to patch up our frail finances and to get some bedclothes. The effort we put into this venture brought very poor results. Certain Latoszewskis - Christians living in Warsaw - owed my father-in-law a substantial sum of money. In the past my father-in-law had helped them to buy a shop on Prozna and he had partly supplied it with merchandise. The shop brings superb profits and the Latoszewskis have become rich. Marysia reminded herself of the debt, which the Latoszewskis still had not paid back. Hence, she decided to go to them and to find out if she could get some money from them. Hoffer also managed to remind himself about a few addresses of people who either owed him some debts from the old times, or could simply be asked for help. He directed Marysia to some

guy, allegedly a Volksdeutsch, an employee of the Wedel factory. She was to collect a rather insignificant debt, but which is of great importance to us. Then she went to some acquaintance of his, with whom he once was on close and friendly terms – a certain Mrs. Szulc. After the Germans had marched into Warsaw, this lady also registered with the Volksliste. She is very rich now and she still runs a prospering delicatessen in Warsaw on Bracka.

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Erecting the stove has come to a standstill for now. It is already the end of September but the stove is still in its infancy. Zdzisio is working slowly. He has clearly become lazy. He meditates, puts on the stove tiles, measures, weighs, cleans and deconstructs yet again. He is clearly dissatisfied. He cannot muster any zeal. The hiding place is unfinished, we are stuck half way. We are worried.

Zdzisio's day looks more or less like this: he lounges about in bed with Halina until twelve o'clock. Then Halina gets up. Half-dressed and unwashed, she bustles about the kitchen and prepares something to eat for herself.

Then Zdzisio manages to get out of the nest and goes to the toilet for a long, one-hour session; he smokes cigarettes there, one after another. After this visit he slightly moistens his face and bathes his eyes. Now he puts on his overalls half way and sits down to breakfast in his morning slippers, which Halina has managed to prepare for him in the meantime. The spouses banter with each other at breakfast. Zdzisio is whining a bit. That he does not like the food, that the bread is not how it should be and finally that Halina cannot cook as well as his mother. Halina is getting really angry. She sends him away to his mother for board and lodging.

"Go once and for all," she says, "you son-of-a-bitch, to your mommy, she'll feed you, and get outta my face."

However, Zdzisio is not aggressive, he only smiles and replies:

"When I tell you the truth, you always lash out at me, you bitch."

And so the breakfast peacefully draws to an end. Sometimes Zdzisio carries out his personal toilet too. It consists in his cutting his nails and toenails for an hour, then he sits on one stool and spreads a newspaper on the second one, and – bent over it – combs out his hair. As it turns out, not only Jews, as the infamous "Stuermer" says, enjoy the exclusive love of bugs and parasites. Not only poor Jews, living in dens, devoid of suitable forms of living, constitute nutrients for colonies of insects. Zdzisio runs a fine, double-sided comb across his head, and with every move a hail of lice showers down upon the spread newspaper. Lice as big as peas shower down from his head upon the paper, like seeds from a ripe ear. After this operation he carefully picks up the newspaper, takes it onto the balcony and shakes off its contents, down into the courtyard. Halina advises him to rub his head with petroleum, which will certainly help him. However, it seems to us that she could very much use this treatment too. For she constantly, relentlessly moves her fingers through the golden cascade of her hair. The heads of both spouses lie on the same pillow and I think that their room could use a decent delousing.

In contrast to them, we have managed to completely eradicate this plague. Thanks to water and lots of soap. All it takes are slightly better living conditions and frequent, thorough washing. After a short period of time we cannot find even the slightest trace of these bugs either in our clothes or on ourselves.

At about four o'clock in the afternoon Zdzisio finally gets down to work. The room is still a mess; there are plenty of stove tiles and other junk. Because of this, Halina sneers at him, "As a stove fitter you ain't worth a shit." Zdzisio cannot digest this insult.

"Don't puzzle your head over it," he says, "You'll see. I'll erect a better stove than all the engineers in the world."

He starts bonding the stove tiles more briskly. He fills the inside of them with cement mortar, he sticks thick wires in between them. He is building as precisely as he has planned to. He fixes a small cast-iron door on the bottom. Underneath there is a grid and above there is a bigger door for the hearth. Above the hearth there is a thick layer of concrete. And above that, up to the very top, there are stove tiles, which are heavily concreted all around, and there is empty space inside.

Only at the end of October can we admire this wonderful achievement of the stove-fitting craft. On the outside our stove does not differ from thousands of other stoves in Warsaw apartments, which were erected by professional artisans. The entrance at the top still remains open. A flap, which Zdzisio will construct in the future, needs to be installed. Around the stove, on the floor, he nails slats onto the boards, just as he nailed them at the walls in the room.

The entrance to the hiding place is completely covered. The stove is drying up. In the meantime, Zdzisio is designing the flap. We can finally clean up the room. We are slowly reaching our goal, despite the fact that there is still a lot of work to be done. It is also high time we started painting the walls. For now, the austere wall un-masks all the pains we have taken. If everything goes well, at this pace Zdzisio will have finished working in our room by Christmas. He is already planning to paint the first room. We do not consider it to be of urgent necessity, but we do not intend to protest. It is aimless to discuss this topic so early. Each day brings us enough to worry about. Zdzisio is already poking about at bazaars, looking for different paint-brushes, pattern stencils and other things. All these purchases really set us back. But what can we do? All we can do is tighten our belts even tighter. And further cut down on our food expenses. The money, exchanged each time by the agency of Ci-chocki, lasts for shorter and shorter periods of time. We are terrified when we think about the future. But we cannot see the end of our worries.

Our only entertainment is the newspaper which Halina buys for us when she is in a good mood. There is also a lending library in the neighborhood. At the beginning, Halina found out about its address and brought us books a couple of times. But she can neither choose books by herself nor ask for them, not to mention the fact that she has absolutely no idea about it. Moreover, she has never had a book in her hands, or ever read one. So unfortunately, we had to give up this pleasure. Checkers and dominoes, which Marysia bought when she was in the city, are a poor substitute for

books. Hoffer and Stas do this sport the most often. Marysia often takes part in the game too. But most of the time we are bored and worried about our future fate.

Zdzisio is dawdling at the flap construction and none of the solutions he comes up with has met with his approval. He covered the raw wall in mid-November and he will paint it only when it has dried up. The stove is slowly drying up too. We threw quite a lot of remnants of burnt pieces of wood, coal and ash into the false hearth. We poured a lot of ash underneath the hearth, into the ashpit. The idea of how to install the flap finally took shape in mid-November. Zdzisio came up with a new idea. The flap will be movable, independent from the rest of the stove. It will lie on a wooden frame built into the stove. The frame will move on two iron guides fixed on both sides of the frame. It is crucial that the flap can be closed and opened from the inside of the stove, without any help from the outside. One again we come to the conclusion that Zdzisio is really very talented. If only he had had a chance to get some education, he would certainly have become a very good constructor. We practice opening and closing the entrance to the stove for days on end. The construction works perfectly, like a well-greased mechanism. When the top of the stove is closed, one cannot spot anything suspicious, even when standing on a stool.

The hiding place is finally finished. We celebrated this event by throwing a small booze-up. We spare neither praise nor words of recognition. Zdzisio is content and proud of his achievement.

"I told you that my head was working fine. Zdzisiek's done much more difficult things. Just wait, lemme finish everything, then you'll see how great everything here will look."

Painting starts as early as at the beginning of December. In the meantime, we lived through a real doomsday and we were convinced that our end was close. We were so paralyzed with fear that we had completely no idea what to do. And everything because of a hair – Halina's light blond hair in Zdzisio's plate of soup.

One November afternoon the married couple was eating dinner. Everything was fine. There is no table yet, so the plates are laid out on a stool. Halina's plate is already empty. Zdzisio is slowly, spoonful after spoonful, savoring sorrel soup with hulled barley. This is his favorite meal. He used to eat the same meal at his mother's. Suddenly, he looks with a fixed glare as if he is going to drop dead on the spot. Halina goes silent, and just a second ago she was jabbering without end. Zdzisio slowly takes a long, fair hair, undoubtedly Halina's, out of his mouth. And suddenly, without any warning, without a word, wham! he throws the plate with the rest of the soup at her. Immediately, Halina starts screaming and hides behind a stool. Zdzisio grits his teeth and says to her, "I told you, I explained it to you, you bitch, to tie your hair when you come close to a pot. You walk around like a sloven, unkempt, and you put this mat of hair of yours into my food. Do you want me to choke on this straggly hair of yours, you bitch?"

Halina screams, "Hell yes, I wanna, you asshole, go to your mother, to that bitch. She'll feed ya."

She aimed a blow at him with the stool.

At that very moment, Zdzisio bang! punched her in the face and threw her from one end of the room against the opposite wall. Halina starts screaming even louder, "I wish the Gestapo would finish you off, you son-of-a-bitch, just wait, I'll be of service for you."

When Zdzisio heard it, he went completely crazy.

"You bitch from Nasielsk, you gonna give me to the Gestapo? To the Germans?" And he punched her a couple more times.

At this point Marysia tried to interfere and to protect Halina and she got a knock on the head from nobody else but Halina. The screams could be heard in the entire house. Halina made one more remark to Zdzisio about the Gestapo, and he pressed her in the corner and was punching her heavily in the face. When Halina managed to free herself from Zdzisio, she ran to the door and onto the balcony. From there she screamed so loudly that everybody in the courtyard could hear her, "Police! Help! He's murdering me! He's gonna kill me!"

We had no idea what to do. We were going to die. Zdzisio ran onto the balcony, grabbed her by the hair and dragged her into the apartment.

"You bitch, if you don't shut up right now, I'll kill you like a dog. I'll chop you into pieces, you bitch, and flush you down the toilet."

Nobody seems to be willing to help Halina. In general, Varsovians only reluctantly interfere in arguments between a husband and wife. Zdzisio's threat, that he would hurt her even more severely and that he would break her bones, has worked. He threw her into the corner like a bundle. Halina is sobbing but much more quietly, and she is not making any threats. Marysia is trying to calm her down and to straighten out her clothes, which got torn up during the struggle. But Halina is still mad, she pushed Marysia back so hard that the latter collapsed. Halina has not calmed down yet.

Zdzisio says, "Leave her alone. So that she knows what will happen the second time she does something like that. If she says a word about the Gestapo, then..."

Slowly the passions cooled down, everything went quiet, the brawl was over. Zdzisio is sitting in the corner and pondering. Halina is washing her face in the kitchen. After two hours the married couple went to sleep in one bed. We had almost lost our lives. Fortunately, everything ended well, and the brawl was even of service to us and had a good side to it. For who of the tenants of the house could suspect now that Jews are hiding in the apartment? Nevertheless, Zdzisio's aversion to food with hairs in it stressed us out a lot and gave us a mighty scare.

But we have recently observed that the better the financial situation of the Krzyczkowskis, the more they fight and disagree. However, the recent major brawl caused by Halina's not abiding by the rules of hygiene during cooking did not stop them from consuming God's gifts on friendly terms, a couple of days later. While eating they were immersed in a serious conversation as to what the Christmas Eve supper should be like.

This vital problem has been seriously troubling the minds of our marital couple for some time. They are preparing for this supper with due diligence. Of course,

Zdzisio wants everything to be like at his mother's. In turn Halina wants to imprint onto the ritual her individual moral values and her knowledge on the topic. The discussion is heated, extremely interesting and informative. Zdzisio dogmatically claims, and he will not yield an inch, that the proper Christmas Eve supper consists of 13 meatless dishes. If the number of dishes is different, then the whole supper will lose its significance.

"But you cannot cook all those things, so that everything is as it should be at Christmas Eve." And here he starts enumerating the ritual dishes: fish fried in oil, what kind of fish and how it should be served. Noodles with poppy, pierogi with poppy, pierogi with cabbage filling, pierogi with mushroom filling, noodles with mushrooms and something else. No meat, God forbid, for all would be ruined, if meat touched any of these sacred ritual dishes. Halina has become dizzy due to all these combinations of noodles, pierogi, mushrooms and poppy, and because of all the strict rules. She has got cold feet, she does not feel up to it.

"Are you crazy? Why do you need so many dishes? I'll make pierogi and noodles different from your mother's and how will you eat all of it? You'll see that you'll throw up due to all those sweet noodles and pierogi."

The discussion is proceeding in a friendly atmosphere. We do not participate in it, but we are listening attentively and with interest to all these erudite expositions. Christmas is in a couple of weeks. The number and quality of dishes will certainly have been lowered by then.

...

A great number of fleas have appeared in the apartment. They bite our whole bodies as in a fury. They enjoy doing it most at night, when they bother us and do not let us sleep. They are constantly feeding on us. It does not help at all that we kill them by the dozen, in large numbers. When we wake up in the morning we have red spots all over our bodies. Some fleas are so full of our blood that they look like small, black pips. They jump very far as if launched from a catapult. You catch one of them and you are sure that you are holding it tightly and that you have it in your fist and that you have killed it. You open your fist and the flea takes a powerful, instant leap and shoots up by your nose, sits a couple of steps further and mocks your clumsiness. The seams of quilted duvets and the folds of dressing gowns are their favorite lodgings. Every morning we look through the duvet and hunt for our persecutors. In the seams, where the thread punctures and squeezes the fabric, we can see many black points, scattered on the red fabric. These impish fleas of ours have stuck into the folds and only their rumps stick out. Hoffer hunts for them with the most skill, vehemence and with the best results. We cannot understand where this plague came from. However, we seriously suspect a duvet that we got. Despite the torment which they cause us, we definitely prefer fleas to lice, which were feeding on us on Grzybowska. To us fleas seem somehow more friendly. If the alternative is a creeping louse, then the flea jumping happily is the lesser of two evils. To exhaust the subject of our trials and tribulations with fleas, I need to add that these ingenious insects are highly resilient and lively. Once we attempted to

radically get rid of all of them. One day we transformed our hiding place into a real gasworks. We put our flea-infested duvet, dressing gown and most of our clothes into the hiding place. We lighted sulfur candles, which we had bought earlier. They were burning for a couple of hours. We closed the stove flap, so almost no air was coming inside. We were convinced that all living creatures would be poisoned, gassed. I opened the flap after a couple of hours. I waited till the gas had escaped and then I entered the room myself. I threw out all the disinfected rags, and while I was doing that, I was almost poisoned by the gas myself, and I almost passed out. But the whole effort was pointless. The next morning we were once again all bitten, and the black rumps of fleas, stuck inside the seams of the duvet, mocked our sadistic intensions.

The end of the redecoration of the flat is like a turning point. We can feel, almost tangibly, that one stage has ended and that another one, worse and more difficult than the previous one, has begun. It is not so much that Zdzisio's attitude towards us has changed. His expectations have increased so much that a catastrophe is simply imminent. The worst thing is that he does not know what to do with himself. Out of the blue a new idea comes into his head. It is not important that the idea is unrealistic under present circumstances and that it clashes with the duty of hiding us, which he has taken upon himself. His excesses cannot be beneficial in any way, they bring about only troubles and they are a waste of money. But what is he keeping the Jews in his apartment for? The Jews need to do whatever comes into his head. They need to pay for whatever he begins to crave for overnight. Nowadays, it is not enough for Zdzisio that he has something to eat, and that luckily he does not starve as he used to. It does not matter that he does not trouble himself with finding money for the food-coupon bread. It does not matter at all that he is supporting himself on our money. So far the Jews have been paying for the apartment's redecoration. Suddenly, these expenses have ceased. But they need to keep on paying. For what? It will eventually turn up, he will find a reason. The Jews need to pay for their lives. They need to pay well for each day that they live through. Otherwise it will be turned into living hell. And in the end they will end up on the street.

For now Zdzisio has not been acting so boldly. But his aim is visible. The initial agreement, according to which we were to pay him five hundred zloty of weekly rent, became a vague memory quite some time ago. In the beginning Zdzisio would ask us to pay him for two weeks in advance, then for a month in advance. Now we are talking months. Nevertheless, it always turns out that when Zdzisio gets money for a month in advance, he is broke just ten days later. Then he starts fighting with Halina, but essentially he has only us on his mind. Then everything ends the way it was supposed to end. We need to pay him for a few weeks in advance yet again. As a result, there is no bill any more. We have paid for so much time in advance that if we were actually to stay so long at Zdzisio's, then it would be better to end our lives just now. We pay not only for the apartment but also for the alcohol, which keeps Zdzisio and Halina in a good mood. We also paid for the shopping that Zdzisio did at the bazaar while the apartment was being redecorated. If we could move freely,

then we could buy three such apartments for the money we have already spent. As soon as we get a couple of thousand zloty from Cichocki, the money disappears in front of our very eyes, like snow melting in the spring.

We are trying to save a bit of money which would suffice for our pitiful board. But this is not the end. It would be relatively not so bad, if only the Krzyczkowskis' appetites stopped here. So far I have been writing only about Zdzisio. But there is also Halina. That is where the shoe pinches. The Krzyczkowskis play different roles. Zdzisio is the host, our owner, the boss of the whole business, whereas Halina is in charge of the supplies. It is solely her domain, and this is how she participates in exploiting and robbing us. Brown coupon bread is our basic and most important foodstuff. This is what we need in the biggest quantity. There are five of us – five young people. We sometimes buy some shoddy beet marmalade, made with saccharine, or a packet of ersatz honey, to eat with the bread. Then comes ersatz tea brew in small bottles, which we use to tinge tea, and finally pastilles of saccharine. We never allow ourselves to buy sugar; it is more than our pocket can stand. We never allow ourselves to eat any cured meat, except for the appetizers which we eat when we drink with the Krzyczkowskis. We have never tasted eggs, butter, cheese, milk or meat in this apartment.

Potatoes, which we add to soup, are our second basic food stuff. We also add small amounts of beans, groats or peas to the soup. Every week we use about half a kilo of fatback. At the beginning of our stay here, from time to time, for breakfast, we used to eat chopped onion fried in oil. We had to give up this luxury a long time ago. We often put noodles into the boiling soup. Ordinary soap is a big expense, but it is even more important for us than food. We eat quite a lot of bread. But our conscience never lets us eat as much as we would like to. We are never full. We are always half-hungry. In February 1944 even the beet marmalade and ersatz honey became a distant memory. Instead, Stasio rubs a clove of garlic against a slice of bread.

We became sure a long time ago that the amount of fatback or potatoes brought by Halina was not the amount we paid her for. For months she has been shamelessly cheating us and robbing us by buying less produce. We cannot say anything because she might not bring us anything at all. Halina resells her coupon bread to us, regardless of the bread she buys without the coupons (the Krzyczkowskis eat white bread and rolls). When we first came here, a one-kilo loaf of coupon bread cost about three or three and a half zloty. The price that Halina demanded was rising steeply with every month, only to reach the astronomical price of seventeen and a half zloty a kilo, at the end of our stay at their place. However, as we found out, the price in the shops remained almost the same during the whole time. The same happened with all products she was buying for us. Before gas was installed, she had been charging us for fuel. But we also had to pay for all the coal and wood she was using. We were paying her lots of money. She was not only robbing us by buying less produce. Making matter worse, we also had to pay several times more than we should have paid, for each undelivered bite included in the bill.

But it is said that nothing dies in nature. And so we marvel at Halina's gold earrings, stuck into her ears, which she had pierced when she was a child. Halina has also recently bought herself a gold ring, and soon after that, another ring like that but with a small stone. She also has a couple of thousand zloty hidden in a stocking – as we will soon find out. After New Year's Eve she also started taking more care of herself than before. She puts on make-up and from time to time goes to the hairdresser's. Of course, there is nothing wrong with this. Every woman tries to look good and nice. One day I felt like teasing her.

"I thought," I say, "that the hairdresser would do your hair differently." "And what did you think?" she immediately assaulted me. "That the hairdresser would put a feather in my a...?" This is what our Hania is like, you cannot joke around with her. Moreover, Hania is seldom in a good mood, perhaps it happens only when she wants to endear herself to Zdzisio. But most of the time her forehead is wrinkled.

It is also bad for us that the Krzyczkowskis do not care about politics at all. Yes, they are convinced that one day this war will end, and that maybe the Germans will lose it. They believe in it. But they do not really care where the front line is, what is happening in the world. They do not read newspapers. They have absolutely no idea where the places mentioned in war announcements are located. Unless it regards the area around Nasielsk, geography is not Zdzisio's domain. If they had had some knowledge of geography, we would have known that right now, in January and February, the Russians had launched a huge winter offensive. When we read about this from *Nowy Warszawski Kurier* [New Warsaw Daily] to Zdzisio, he can only say, "That's far away from here, who the hell knows where that is. When they come, maybe the Americans will have already been here?" All in all, he is trying to convince us that the liberation will not come so fast.

...

[Halina] found Zdzisio on Freta at these two sluts' place, these two who were here last week to get the money. Their apartment is a small, backstreet brothel and the two women, who live there, are sophisticated prostitutes. In their cozy dive Halina saw a table with wine, vodka and appetizers, which had been there since yesterday. The booze-up was in full flow. Some alcohol was spilled around and some glasses got knocked over. The women are really drunk. Zdzisio is sitting on a sofa in loose attire. The sluts are almost naked and one of them, the one who was allegedly the wife of a policeman, is sitting on Zdzisio's lap and is embracing him affectionately.

At this very moment Halina opened the door and entered the scene. Zdzisio was so shocked that he lost his head and could not speak. He simply could not understand how she had guessed where he had been and how she could have exposed him so fast. Hence, when Halina started hurling abuse at him and whipping his girlfriends into line, while clearly and straightforwardly stressing their profession, Zdzisio was so embarrassed that he chickened out, and peacefully let himself be escorted home, like a lamb going to the slaughter. But the situation is different now. Zdzisio has had time to take a breath and to calm down. He is boiling with anger

now. He cannot accept the fact that Halina insulted and humiliated him in front of the merry sluts on Freta. Nor is he elevated by the fact that she is scolding him now. Moreover, she has screamed out, in front of us, everything she had seen there. So Zdzisio simply cannot let Halina make a total bastard out of him. Halina is on the loose, big time.

"You've been caught to be a slave laborer? You trade at the bazaar, you tramp. You fuck whores for my money, you son-of-a-bitch, and then you come to me to bed."

Zdzisio is listening to Halina's accusations and each of her words is like a slap on his face. He is boiling with anger and embarrassment, he is grating his teeth.

"Shut up right now, you bitch. That's enough."

"And what if I don't?" Halina snaps back "Maybe you'll beat me up?"

At this moment Zdzisio grabs her by the blouse and punches her hard on the face a few times. Halina starts screaming even louder and this time she starts defending herself. She knows that this time she is right. She had scratched Zdzisio in the face so badly that for many days he had to explain himself to his buddies at the bazaar by saying that he had cut himself while shaving. Zdzisio has gone completely wild. He is beating Halina with all his might. We are more scared than during any of the previous brawls. We are sure that this time it will end badly. Zdzisio, as never before, has lost control of himself. I intervene with Hoffer and we separate him from Halina by force. She is badly bruised and she shoots out into the kitchen. She is making threats from the kitchen but she will not risk coming into the room. We have managed to restrain Zdzisio. He has calmed down. It is finally over. Both sides have explained to each other everything that there was to explain. Zdzisio, tired of the all-night-long booze-up, has thrown himself onto the bed. Soon he is snoring so loud that everybody in the apartment can hear him. Halina has not stuck her head out of the kitchen yet.

This has been the biggest and the most serious brawl since the time we came here. The spouses do not talk to each other for several days. Maybe because the scratches on Zdzisio's face are still quite visible. Halina shares the bed with Zdzisio but she wanted him to eat elsewhere.

"He'd better go to Freta Street, they'll feed him there."

But we have managed to talk her out of this. We point out the fact that if Zdzisio really followed her advice then the situation would deteriorate. Whereas this was probably just a short-lived pursuit of adventure, which has already ended. So Halina has thought it over and she puts food in front of Zdzisio, for now without saying a word to him. Zdzisio did not say no to the food; he is not fussing and it seems that he finds it tasty. So the storm has almost come to an end. Any further attempts at improving the spouses' attitude towards each other is unnecessary. As it has been many times before, their sharing the bed will reconcile them and fix the rest of the problems. And then we need to defend ourselves and be on our guards.

We are almost penniless again. The money that Cichocki has recently fixed for us was supposed to be enough for two months, but we are broke after two weeks.

We are between the devil and the deep blue sea. We are the unfortunate material that they press, beat, punch and treat as they please. All of Zdzisio's excesses, Halina's anger, all their brawls and fights eventually concentrate on us. We are guilty of everything. All this takes a heavy toll on us. It is we who tremble, scared to death, when the Krzyczkowskis mill around and shout. We fear that at any moment somebody may rush into the apartment in order to find out what is happening and why they argue all the time. It is entirely probable that during a hubbub like the last one, furious Halina may start screaming into the courtyard that Zdzisio is hiding Jews, and that she needs help. Everything is possible when she is angry, when she wants to take revenge on Zdzisio. One can expect anything from her.

The recent brawls have exhausted us so much that we do not know what to do with ourselves. We are extremely distressed and frustrated due to fear. Neither Zdzisio nor Halina lets us have a moment of peace and rest. Halina is constantly threatening him that she will leave him because she has no profit from all this. So Zdzisio should manage his own affairs and deal with us on his own. In turn Zdzisio walks with his head hung down and makes a long face as if we have done him some major harm. The only remedy, the only way to buy a few moments of peace, to lighten up the faces of our hosts, to buy another few days of life, is to keep the purse constantly open, to continually reach inside and endlessly give, give, pay for each breath. But we have so little money in the purse. It becomes lighter and lighter with each day, and we cannot see an end to all this. We dread the thought of it becoming empty even for one day, because if it does become empty we will end up on the street. Neither Zdzisio nor Halina will let us stay at their place free of charge, even if we did not eat anything, even if were to stay here only for one hour. So Marysia needs to go to the city and meet with Cichocki sooner than we expected.

Indeed, a couple of days after Zdzisio's infamous adventure, Marysia took one hundred dollars with her and went to Cichocki to sell it. We cannot do it differently; we can sell dollars only by somebody's agency. So let it be Cichocki, whom we trust and whom we have tried out. We know very well that we lose money this way, but we cannot do anything about it. For Cichocki is also no saint or a philanthropist towards us. He earns good money on each exchange he conducts for us.

The amount of money that we get for the sold foreign currency has not changed since the time when he started doing this for us. However, we know that the value of the dollar and of gold is steeply rising because of the Germans' continuously deteriorating political situation. The Krzyczkowskis squeeze big sums of money from us. Moreover, we are also suffering a substantial loss here. And this loss is substantially responsible for the poverty we live in now. There is also one other reason why we stick to Cichocki and why we do not look for another intermediary when it comes to money exchange: the amount of money he gives us is smaller but certain. He will not take our money. He is too decent for that. So all other dirty tricks are impossible. Marysia, and even I, can meet with him with all confidence. Nothing bad, no danger awaits us from his side. He knows many people to whom it is right for us to turn to when we are trying to solve our problems. Most of the time he does not refuse to do

us these small favors, which require his turning to people for help on behalf of Jews. This is of great importance to us.

Marysia received from Cichocki half of the money in advance. As for the rest of it, she is supposed to meet with him in a few days' time in the city. Either she will go alone to the meeting or Zdzisio, with a letter from us, will come to the prearranged place to get the money. Marysia told Cichocki that we had recently experienced troubles and distress at Zdzisio's place. We want Cichocki to meet Zdzisio, but at the same time he should not reveal that he knows that we have been hiding at Zdzisio's place. Zdzisio could get scared and our trickery in that regard could have the opposite effect, it could lead to a truly tragic end.

We want to convince Zdzisio that we have some support with people in the city. But first and foremost, we want Zdzisio to become personally convinced that we get the money from the outside, from other sources. Cichocki will not give us away. Zdzisio will think him an intermediary between us and somebody more powerful, whom Cichocki also does not know personally, and who protects us. Nowadays, such excessive conspiracy is nothing unusual. Zdzisio will recognize Cichocki for sure. Marysia has described him so precisely that a mistake on Zdzisio's part is impossible. She also asked Cichocki to take Zdzisio to a bar for a drink and to treat him in a friendly way. Some ideas are germinating in our minds but it is too early to talk about them. Maybe we will be able to direct the turn of events in such a way that in the future, with Cichocki's help, we will absorb Zdzisio a little and we will limit his independence to some extent.

Some time after Zdzisio's January advances, the Krzyczkowskis have completely made up. They got most of the money that Marysia had brought and this fact contributed most to their reconciliation. For now, Zdzisio has totally lost all his liking for forbidden love adventures and he sticks decently to what he has at home. The good, old, happy times have returned to their married life. Halina has forgiven and forgotten all his recent marital infidelities. Indeed, she is complaining about Zdzisio for a completely different reason. As she says, he has become as virile as a bull in spring.

...

For Halina and Zdzisio [our] furs are a real fortune. They are picking and choosing as if the furs were treasures. Halina is trying fur collars on, one after another, in order to see whether they suit her. At once, we express our hope that she chooses and takes the one she likes best.

We would be exceedingly happy if we managed to get four, five thousand zloty for all the furs. For ourselves, we are leaving a big, very worn-out men's fur coat lined with sheepskin. If we sold it we would get the equivalent of two or three liters of moonshine, tops. So it will be more beneficial to us if we have something to cover ourselves with at night. By the way, later on the coat became infested by an enormous number of fleas. They were numerous as never before, and it was impossible to get rid of them. We are going to sell the rest. Zdzisio is going to take all these furs to the bazaar and try to sell them. In all likelihood, the result will be better than in

the case of his selling blood sausages and moonshine. We are going to buy furniture for the obtained takings. After yesterday's experience we no longer consider making any protests or calling into question the necessity of buying the furniture for the Krzyczkowskis.

It took a couple of days for our frayed nerves to calm down. We were simply devastated by the fact that Zdzisio wanted to turn us out into the street just like that. Our illusions have been shattered.

Leosia got badly bruised during our hasty and frantic evacuation to the hiding place. Due to exasperation and fear, the poor girl fell into the hole in the stove and ground her skin off in many places. I am more worried about her health than about all the other problems, of which we have enough. I sometimes realize that I unintentionally observe her with worry. Recently she has lost a lot of weight; she is forcing herself to eat. I noticed many times that she did not eat her meager rations. She does not complain but she cuddles up to me more and more often, as if she were looking for my help, for rescue.

My head is splitting. I cannot think of anything. We do not know any trusted doctor to whom we could turn. Besides, Zdzisio will not let us bring any doctor here so that Leosia could be examined. We are helpless. We have no idea what to do and how to treat the illness. And it is beyond doubt that Leosia is seriously ill and that she is suffering.

Zdzisio got down to fur trading with great enthusiasm. He disappears for days on end; he trades at the bazaar with great verve. This time he did not need to go to great lengths to sell the merchandise. For any price he gets is pure profit. And all the profit is meant for him. He knows this too. Zdzisio takes out different furs; he sorts them. The inventory is visibly shrinking but we have not seen any money yet. Our host often comes home tipsy and in a good mood. It is possible that from time to time he goes to Freta. He is still on friendly terms with Halina and they treat each other tenderly.

We have recently spotted Halina's new purchase – a gold watch with a bracelet. It seems that she bought it for the money from fur collars. It may also be an outcome of her cheating us on food prices. Our furs served only as a ransom. Thanks to them we bought from the Krzyczkowskis a dozen or so days of peace and rest. Nevertheless, Easter is coming and they have not forgotten about their main aim – the furniture. The Krzyczkowskis are preparing themselves for this holiday with even greater pomp than for Christmas. They are already making various plans.

All the furs have finally gone to the bazaar, the inventory has been exhausted. The merchandise has found purchasers. This time there are no returns. Consequently, they should square up with us. Of course the sums of money Zdzisio got for individual furs are not taken into consideration. Zdzisio sums everything up, in bulk, *wrumel*, as he calls it. The calculation was truly complicated? Underhand? Zdzisio got a good price for everything, no trader would have gotten a better one. He got as much as three thousand zloty for all the furs. According to him, it is an awful lot. Out of these three thousand, one has somehow disappeared. He has only two thousand

for the furniture purchase, far from enough. He needs at least three thousand more. We will have to "lend" him this money. Hence, in mid-March Marysia will have to get in touch with Cichocki and exchange money yet again. We are already aware that our situation is much worse than two months ago. It is necessary for us to try again to establish broader contact with people. We can sense that we are starting to weigh heavily on the Krzyczkowskis. Soon, a moment may come when they are going to want to get rid of us. Besides, we need to look for some contact due to Leosia's health condition, which is not improving. On the contrary, it is getting worse and worse. We are no longer the Krzyczkowskis' tenants, we do not pay for our stay. Each time we buy a few or a dozen or so days of life, regardless of the sum we pay.

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He has no clue what really happened with the janitor's family and why they were actually finished off. According to him, there are different explanations. Some say that they were turning Jews in to the Germans. In turn others claim that they were turning in and giving the organization members away to the Germans. So it was not an ordinary crime or an act of personal vengeance. A just sentence has been executed. The scumbags have gotten what they deserved. We know now that one can also die for giving Jews, or even non-Jews, away to the Germans; that doing so is not always rewarded. The Krzyczkowskis also know it now. Just a few months ago one did not hear about such things. The very awareness that the long arm of the law reaches and kills may repress many ignoble intentions and acts.

The streets keep talking about this event for many days. The Krzyczkowskis are also upset for a long time. Maybe they have become aware of the fact that not everything revolves around trading blood sausage, drinking moonshine and chasing after girls. Maybe they have comprehended that Warsaw is not only about bazaars and tripe with meatballs, that a horrible war is in progress here. A war waged also from behind, far away from the front line, a war for life and death. There are two sides of the barricade, there is no place for anybody in between. The day may soon come when everybody here will also have to declare on which side they are on.

Leosia is feeling worse and worse. She is only a ghost of the former plump girl. All her clothes hang loose on her. Grief fills my heart when I look at her. A dry, obstinate cough tears her chest apart and does not let her rest even for a moment. Her big eyes look at us with complaint, and in them one can see the suffering of a child, which she still is. She does not complain. She only wants to be with me. We cannot give her better food. We have asked Halina a couple of times to bring some butter and milk for her. She weasels out of doing this however she can. One time she cannot get it, then they do not want to sell it to her; and finally she says that she would have to go as far as to the bazaar. After much insistence she finally brought a bottle of milk a couple of times. Then she announced that she would no longer busy her ass with such shopping. Leosia does not want Halina to buy expensive milk and butter for her. Not when we are starving and eating only coupon bread and a small bowl of almost fasting soup. I feel as bad as at the Umschlagplatz, just before they put us into the freight cars.

Halina is stirring Zdzisio up against us and is pestering him day and night. We are not bringing them any profit, they are only risking their necks for us. Other people who are hiding Jews at least have gotten rich. And their Jews pay only for the food. It does not matter that they got money for a year in advance, and that regardless of that, we regularly pay them for every week. An acquaintance who stayed at their place at Easter told them they had a beautiful apartment and that it had to be worth a lot. So now Zdzisio's head is full of ideas. He intends to sell it, get a good bit of money and get down to some serious trading. We do not know whether he is blackmailing us and just threatening us to squeeze a bigger sum of money out of us, or he is seriously thinking about getting rid of the apartment. When it comes to Zdzisio everything is possible. He has not told us to go and look for some other place. I guess he does not want to sell the apartment with us sitting in the hiding place.

We couldn't be any more distraught. Regardless of the major political failures of the Germans and the beating they are getting on battlefields, the war drags on. We are losing hope and we believe less and less that we will manage to endure all this. Our strength is wearing thin and we are surprised that we have managed to last out so far. The events in the city, the sharpened situation, the terror increasing with each passing day - all this is undoubtedly having its effect on the Krzyczkowskis and is breaking them. They are getting scared. Maybe that is why they are becoming more and more pesky and angry with us. And this is the worst. Zdzisio is becoming more of a scoundrel. One needs to admit that so far he has been grumbling, whining, fidgeting, making a sullen, gloomy face, trying to squeeze another couple of thousand zloty "in advance," but he was not a scoundrel. Halina's behavior towards us has always been a reflection of his mood and of the line of conduct which he chose in a given period of time.

However, I have an impression that the Krzyczkowskis themselves do not know yet what they want, that they have not entirely made up their mind yet. Their chaotic conduct is a proof that they are tangled up in contradictions. They would like to get rid of us, but on the other hand, maybe they are not sure whether this is a good idea, whether they might not end up high and dry. Whether selling the apartment, after having gotten rid of us, would ensure the prosperity which they have dreamt of. All in all, they are determined not to let us go smoothly. A feeling, so far not a clear one, is starting to germinate in us. A feeling that their intentions towards us are unfair. If they knew the whole tragic truth, then it would be even worse. For we have nowhere to go. For we do not want to and we cannot leave the apartment, into whose preparation we have put most of our money. Hence, we must sustain and even broaden our contact with the world. We have a sufficient and convincing reason for doing it, ready at hand. We want to save Leosia. Besides, we need to have money again.

And now the Krzyczkowskis are trying to discourage us. As if they had a good reason for doing so. They will not let either Marysia or any other of us to go to the city.

"If she goes out," Zdzisio says, "then she'd better not come back because I won't let her in. There won't be no running around. Sit here, if you wanna stay here."

But we must go get a doctor, we must save Leosia. For we cannot let her die in front of our very eyes.

"You're pulling a fast one on me," says Zdzisio. "She'll be fine, she won't die."

"We also do not have money," I say.

"I don't trust you at all," replies Zdzisio. "Who in the city would give you so much money? You're simply always trying to fool me – stupid Zdzisio. You're only saying that you don't have money, that you never have any money. Marysia goes out and picks it on the street, doesn't she? You won't feed me no baloney. You're not gonna fool Zdzisio with this chat. If the need arises, you'll find some money. Cichocki has been giving you money, ain't it true? Gimme a letter to Cichocki and I'll bring you the money, nobody will have to wander about."

He is holding us in check now. It is necessary for us to buy some time. We certainly cannot engage ourselves in an open war with him right now. We need to do everything peacefully, not to press his buttons, not to slam any door behind us, not let them drive us into a blind alley or onto a path from which there is no return. We need to be gentle, diplomatic, if we can only manage it. We have come to know Zdzisio a bit. We can sense Halina's substantial contribution to our present troubles. She is constantly and continually stirring him against us, playing on his nerves and provoking him.

"Look, you goon, you're a beggar. Others who keep Jews have gotten rich. But we haven't. They've got lots of money. They only don't wanna give it to us. They've have been taking you in the whole time. And you're a galoot and you let them take you in. These kikes are smart. I know them. They're only pretending that they don't have no money. They don't buy anything to eat, but they won't fool me."

Often at night we can hear these and similar theories from their room. We are their business, so they are discussing how it should be run.

Halina has gone shopping and Zdzisio, incompletely dressed, is wandering about the apartment uncertain as to how he should spend the rest of the day. Hoffer seizes this opportunity and works him.

"Sit Zdzisio," he says, "We'll talk in peace. Halina is not here, nobody will disturb us. I have been trying to talk to you, but there has never been a convenient moment for that."

We all discreetly move away. But I am anxiously trying to listen to the conversation.

"I can see," says Hoffer, "that lately you have been discontent, that something has been bothering you. I can feel it and we know that you are no scoundrel. Your honor means more to us than everything else in the world. You should know that if we did not trust you, we would not have come to you. For we had another place. But we preferred you and we still want to stay at your place, to stay with you till the end. For you can see that it is going to be over soon. It is going to be over before you have batted an eye. Just a couple more weeks tops and it is going to be over. You can ask whomever you want in the city, and they will tell you that if nothing changes, the Russians will be in Warsaw in a month or two. We have been here with you two for

almost a year now. Everything has been fine so far. God has preserved us and you. For sure we will endure this short period of time that is still ahead of us. You know that the apartment is good. You have prepared such an excellent hiding place for us that even the best engineer would not have come up with anything better. You will see that people from abroad, tourists, will be coming here and admiring how you did everything and how you provided us with shelter. You have not thought of it, but it will happen. Do not listen to Halina, she is putting some stupid ideas into your head, and she does not understand what it is all about. For you have your own mind and your honor. You managed to build all this and we have lasted out almost a year now. This did not happen so that everything could be wasted now. You will sell the apartment and then what? The money will disappear and you will not have a second apartment like this. And what good will come out of the whole trading? They might catch you at the bazaar and you will be exposed at the very end of everything. And it will not be easy for us to find a new place, now when Leosia is so sick. For we know that you did not take us in and that you have not been keeping us for a year, only to have a bit of food out of this. You have not been risking your life to somehow survive the war. For you must count on benefiting from this after the war. We think so too. For if you save our lives, we will not leave you. You will not have to kill yourself by working too hard.

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I fell asleep and I woke up at some point. I can hear Leosia breathing with difficulty. I start twisting and turning. Then suddenly Hoffer puts his hand on me and orders me to be quiet. The Krzyczkowskis are not asleep, they are talking in loud whispers and we can hear what they are talking about through the half-closed door. I try almost not to breathe. It is not a good conversation, it is about us. Halina is putting some ideas into Zdzisio's head:

"You moron, you let them take you in, you believe everything they say. They're stuffed with dough and you keep them here free of charge. We're only risking our lives. What profit do you have out of that? I used to buy them more chow, so we had some money out of that. But now they're asking to bring them so little food that it's not worth doing it, and we have nothing out of that. I'm telling you, Zdzisio, you won't get rid of them so easily, nor will you be able to sell the apartment. Do what I tell you, what everybody does. Let's frisk them and you'll find all their dough. We need to frisk them. And then we'll think whether we should keep them and the apartment, or we'll think what to do with them. Don't be a sucker, I'm telling you, otherwise you'll be a beggar all your life." Halina is trying to convince Zdzisio as if she expects him to resist, as if she is counting on his opposition. So this is what they are aiming at: they want to rob us and then they will see what to do next.

"I'm telling you," adds Halina, "They won't buy you a rickshaw or give you money for it. Marysia is wandering about now and going out to the city for so long that she must be up to something, they want to con us."

For a long time we can hear whispers and persuasion coming from their room. It seems that they have finally fallen asleep. It is not good. Some time after that,

Hoffer, in his socks, quietly sneaks into the toilet. He stayed there for a dozen or so minutes, and then, like a ghost, without making any sound, he came back and lay down next to us.

The sun is beginning to rise. We are trying to take a nap but sleep will not come. The Krzyczkowskis got up early. Halina is in the kitchen. Zdzisio went to the toilet. Now he is beginning to hang around the apartment, he does not say a word to us; he has hung his head; he is not looking us in the eye. He sat down at the table; he is thinking about something; he starts hanging around the room again. He wants something but it is awkward for him to start talking about it. Finally, Hoffer decides to start talking to him.

"Come here, Zdzisio," he says. "Why are you so worried? What is happening with you? Just a few more days and you will be able to put a rickshaw together."

"No, man, it's not about a rickshaw. You want to use us again. You're sitting on dough and I have to kill myself. Either I get some big cash or I'll have to put all this in order."

"You know what?" says Hoffer, "You always think that we are taking you in, you do not believe us that we do not have money, that we get it from the outside and that we give almost all of it to you. We leave only the amount we need for everyday expenses. Listen, to show you that you are wrong, I am telling you this myself: frisk us. You do not need to talk this over with Halina. If you find any hidden money you can take it and you can throw us onto the street."

"No, I don't wanna take it from you," says Zdzisio, "but I need to know how it really is."

"Don't waste your time," says Hoffer. "You can start now." And he throws everything onto the floor, he empties his pockets. "Let's stop playing games. Here, frisk us, and call Halina. For she will not believe you that you have frisked us properly." We are nervous, our hands are shaking. Zdzisio, like a professional, browses through and turns over every piece of Hoffer's clothing. Halina has come and is assisting him now. The scum has turned white. Zdzisio is composedly doing his job.

"Here," he says to Halina, "take Leosia into the kitchen and search her well, you know how." Leosia is walking after her as if she was walking to the gallows. She can barely move her legs. We stay in the room with Zdzisio, who is frisking Hoffer so thoroughly that he would not miss a pin. Before the frisk, straight away, Hoffer had put a couple of thousand zloty, which he had had on him, in front of Zdzisio.

Hoffer's frisk lasts a long time. Zdzisio is disappointed, he has not found anything noteworthy. Halina is frisking Leosia in the kitchen. Zdzisio has finished frisking Hoffer, then he starts frisking me. He has never frisked me so thoroughly. Finally it is Stas's turn. Halina comes back with Leosia and declares that she has not found anything on her. She has searched each centimeter of her body. She has conducted a gynecological examination as if she were a doctor.

Zdzisio is upset, the married couple are nervous. They have not found anything on Stas either. Halina does not give up.

"Look through all their rags and look in their hiding place," she says to Zdzisio.

Zdzisio had thought about it himself, it was unnecessary to remind him of that. Now he is rummaging through our duvet and the fur, with which we cover ourselves. Finally, he goes into the hiding place and carefully, with a candle in his hand, he checks if we have hidden anything there.

The Krzyczkowskis are disappointed and surprised. A total failure. And they were absolutely sure that we possessed a great fortune and that they would cash in on it.

We could not be any more nervous. The Krzyczkowskis thought that Hoffer and Leosia's frisk would be the most fruitful. When they did not find anything on them, Zdzisio still believed that some gold was hidden in some nook of the hiding place or in the straw mattress. But this was a complete flop. Consequently, the Krzyczkowskis do not know what to do now. And Halina, who for a long time has cherished a hope of growing rich, has wilted now. All she is left with are the poor, sick and scared Jews. We are going through terrible moments which may determine our fate. The Krzyczkowskis' reaction could have tragic consequences for us. After a few minutes after the end of the frisk, Zdzisio sat down; he has hung his head. He is looking down on the floor, and it seems that he sees nothing. He is clearly shocked by the frisk's outcome and he cannot believe that it could be real.

"I must sell the apartment now," he finally says, "I'll bring over some buyers and it can go to hell."

"Zdzisio," says Hoffer, "nothing has happened. You cannot throw us out onto the street. You do not want us to die, do you? What is your problem? We will fix you up with a rickshaw, we will find money for it. I am sure that in a few days you will be able to start putting it together, and that in a month you will drive it out into the city. We have never deceived you and now, when I swear to you that I will buy you a rickshaw, you can start looking for parts for it. Put together a new, good rickshaw, just like you fancy, so that you like it, because you know what is good. Do not buy an old wreck, so that you do not have to kill yourself later. Be patient and endure a bit longer and you will not regret it. You will have a far better apartment. I have a house in Warsaw. So does Marysia. You will get whatever you want. We have been sitting at your place for so long and you think that we would grudge you anything later? Here is some money, send Halina to buy you something to drink and some snacks and calm down. I am also so nervous that I need to have a drink to come to. Do not worry so much, you have not lost anything. Just one or two months more and you will not give a hoot for anybody; you will be laughing at everybody."

"Go, Halina," says Zdzisio to her, "and bring a liter, cos I don't know what to do now, I need to consider what we should do next."

Halina did the shopping exceptionally fast and she came back. Hoffer pours the whole liter into four glasses. The whole liter of moonshine disappeared in one gulp. We chase the drink of liquor with the snack Halina has brought. The alcohol is beginning to take effect. We are thinking with difficulty, we feel giddy, the tongue is as if it got tied into a knot that cannot be undone.

Halina has gone into the kitchen to get something. Hoffer ate something and one minute later he felt sick, he grabbed himself by the stomach.

"What kind of damned moonshine has Halina bought today?" he said and ran to the toilet while unzipping his pants.

Zdzisio is laughing, he is in a slightly better mood. "The old man should not even take a sip," he says.

We can hear Hoffer flushing the toilet and moaning. He comes back after a few minutes. In the meantime, Zdzisio goes onto the balcony to look around at the world and to get some fresh air. Hoffer beckoned Stas inconspicuously and when the latter came closer to him for a moment, Hoffer put a small bundle into his palm. Stas immediately hid it in his pocket and went away. There was nobody in the room at that time, and neither Zdzisio nor Halina knows that something suspicious has taken place.

"Go," says Hoffer to Zdzisio, "look around the city as to where they sell parts to build a rickshaw. I am sure you will be able to construct the chassis with Cichocki's help. Your rickshaw will be one of a kind in the whole of Warsaw."

Halina had a headache, the full glass of moonshine had knocked her off her feet. She went to bed in her clothes, just as she was. She is fast asleep now. Zdzisio is able to hold his liquor; he is more resilient. He's going to the city. But today he wants to look dignified, staidly, not like a scoundrel. He cannot go out in his stained overalls. He changes into my navy blue suit. He does not bother to ask for my permission. It seems that he is not going to give it back. I do not say a word.

So far Zdzisio has not reacted to Hoffer's whole speech about the rickshaw. He did not say no, nor did he say that he agreed. We do not know if he wants to keep us here now when he knows that we possess neither money nor treasures. Everything is still left hanging in the air and we have no idea if we will manage to stay here. We also do not know why Zdzisio has gone to the city. Did he go to look for rickshaw parts, or for somebody to buy the apartment? He did not say. The fact that he was drinking vodka with us after the frisk is to some extent a good sign. He might think it over and not throw us onto the street straight away.

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The hapless rickshaw has finally been born and Zdzisio made a show out of driving it to the bazaar. He was driving the whole day, he wasted some money on drinking with his buddies and he did not earn anything. He did not get even one ride. At the bazaars no one is trading any smuggled food any more. Nothing more from the east comes here. Only trains with wounded and escaping Germans. Only a few hucksters offer a piece of extremely expensive fatback from under their skirts. German agents wander about the market and hunt for profiteers.

We are to blame also for the fact that smuggling has ceased, that nobody is trading at the bazaars, and that Zdzisio cannot make a bundle now. Five years of terrifying war have not taught them anything. We are witnessing historic events. In front of our very eyes, the world is being plowed with a gigantic plow of war, only to begin a new life soon. For sure, a better one than the former one. The Krzyczkowskis are always angry. They consider themselves wronged by the fact that the Różycki bazaar in Warsaw is not prospering.

The Germans, who seem totally hectic, have lost control over the situation. On 23 July they give in to panic. They are escaping from Warsaw in large numbers. All German civilians are leaving Warsaw however they can, using whatever means of transport. They are escaping further to the west. By horse-drawn wagons, cars, trains – any means of transport is good. Warsaw sees it and the Varsovians are standing on the streets and laughing at them completely openly. This mass exodus lasts three days, until 27 July. But they have not entirely left the city and they have not left it open. They have left some of the administration, or maybe the front units have taken charge of the city. On 27 July they order obligatory mobilization of 100,000 Poles who are to dig trenches which will protect Warsaw against the charging Bolsheviks. The announcement has been posted in the whole city. So they have not given up Warsaw yet, they want to turn this enormous, one-million-resident city into a point of resistance.

These are probably the last days, the last hours of the Germans in Warsaw. The obligatory mobilization of Poles who were to dig trenches is a total disaster. A complete flop, big time. The Poles sabotage the order and do not report for the job.

Zdzisio does not leave the apartment because he fears that they could catch him on the street. There are many men like this. Despite all his contentiousness, Zdzisio is scared stiff of the Germans. The rickshaw is standing in the courtyard, waiting for better times for smugglers. We are hungry and nervous beyond limits. It is difficult to convince Halina to bring us a newspaper. She is as surly as a bad dog. But she has finally brought it. The rag is filled with venomous garbage addressed to communists of Jewish descent. The announcement about the situation on the front line is the most important. This one talks about fighting going on south of Warsaw, about places by the Vistula River. During the day, the number of planes crossing the sky is increasing. Fighter planes are flying high up. The German artillery is shooting, but only sporadically and to no avail whatsoever. We are devoid of any news from the city. Zdzisio is so scared that he does not stick his head out and Halina is a very poor informer.

In the evening of Saturday 29 July we can hear strange, powerful thunder from the east, from Praga. But it is not a summer thunderstorm. It is the front artillery firing. We can clearly hear the explosions. Our throats are tight with emotion. This moment, when the echoes of the fight have knocked on our door again, has been preceded by years of suffering and toil. We do not sleep a wink that night and we are listening attentively to the cannonade from the area around Otwock, maybe from Świder. Next day – Sunday, 30 July 1944. During the day we cannot hear the artillery. It might be still quite far away. We are excited. The night explosions are still ringing in our ears. We are counting the hours. If only Marysia would come and tell us what the situation is really like. She must know best what is happening. But the Germans are still in Warsaw. You can feel it in the air. It is Sunday and it is quiet everywhere. The hours pass slowly. We are waiting longingly for the night to come. Will we hear the artillery?

We have eaten only a couple of slices of stale bread during the whole day. We do not cook anything due to the lack of produce and willingness. The Krzyczkowskis

stay away from us. Only Hoffer is not nervous. He is praying all the time. I am so nervous that I cannot focus my thoughts.

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Marysia has come back. The day is coming to an end. The sun is setting. It is getting dark. The time is passing slowly, so fearfully slowly. I am convinced that the whole city, the whole million people, are waiting today. I know that the city is only napping but is not really sleeping. I guess nobody is sleeping. The rumble of the artillery penetrates the silence of this night too. The war does not sleep, the war knows no rest.

Monday, the last day of July 1944. Our nervousness has reached its zenith. For something needs to happen. Zdzisio has mustered his courage to go to the city. He comes back shortly after. There are many patrols in the city. He did not go today to Praga, to the Rozycki market. He did not have the courage. He came back hungry, and immediately after coming in, he orders Halina to make him dinner. He execrates the buyer who did not come to finish the transaction. But we have no idea what good would come out of his collecting the dozen or so thousand zloty for the apartment. The Krzyczkowskis' behavior is as strange as they are. After all, we are going through some breakthrough moments.

It is a hot day, we cannot breathe. We are tired and nervous. We even pay less attention than before to Zdzisio's mood, to Halina's gibes. We are kept in suspense. Instinctively, with all our senses, we are prepared for a change. Something must happen. A piece of bread, some hot, tinged water - this is what we have eaten today. A day of waiting and unfulfilled wishes. Another dusk and another evening. We can hear the artillery cracking again, but they are not any closer than yesterday or the day before yesterday. It is the third night already. While we are listening attentively to the sounds of the cannonade we are chasing away the sleep, we are awfully tired. We take a nap and we wake up. Nothing has happened. The night is over. We feel only worse and more depressed than yesterday. Something broke in the war mechanism and it has suspended the war's momentum.

Today is Tuesday, 1 August 1944. The day is going to be warm and without even one cloud, just like yesterday. The Krzyczkowskis have got up. Zdzisio is sitting out his morning time in the toilet, Halina is bustling about in the kitchen and preparing breakfast. We do not disturb them. About ten o'clock we sneak into the toilet one at a time, and then we all wash ourselves in the kitchen. After breakfast Zdzisio went to get some fresh air and to look around the city. At eleven o'clock the siren starts hooting fearfully to portend an air-raid alert. But we cannot hear any planes; the antiaircraft artillery is also not firing. The alarm is weird. Zdzisio disappeared somewhere and has been gone for a couple of hours. Halina has been in the apartment for all this time. She is whipping up some food in the kitchen. Suddenly, at about two o'clock we can hear somebody knocking on the front door. It is not Zdzisio, it is some stranger. Fast, without waiting for Halina, we climb up into the hiding place. When nervous Halina storms into the room, the last one of us is hiding in the stove. We draw the latch and we are waiting nervously. Who could it be? Halina slowly

went to open the door. The stranger is in the apartment. But a joyful surprise awaits us. It is Marysia. We can hear that Halina is getting angry and that Marysia is trying to calm her down. We open the latch and get out of the stove. We could not be any happier.

Halina threatens us, “Zdzisio will come any minute now,” she says, “and he’ll teach you a lesson. We’ve had enough of you.”

Then we can hear shots on the street and it seems that the shots are being fired from many directions. Just after that, breathless Zdzisio storms in and shouts right at the door.

“Hide right now. Some Germans were shot on the street. Some soldiers. Gendarmes will surround the street any minute now.”

Halina reports to him that Marysia has come back.

“And why did she come here?” he asks, “She won’t go out today. I won’t let her.”

And we are closed in the hiding place yet again. We are talking in whispers. The Krzyczkowskis locked the apartment and made off. But something is wrong. We are almost certain that something remarkable has happened. It seems that it is not an ordinary murder of a German on the street. Marysia says that the city is suspiciously nervous today. There has been unusual commotion since this morning. The trams are full. They do not run on many routes and not in all directions. People are hurrying somewhere and there are lots of men. She came to us on foot from the Unii Lubelskiej Square. She is worried what will happen when she does not come back home today. The hosts will be worried. . . . It is quiet in the apartment but through the walls we can hear the echo of the fusillade on the streets. We can hear shots fired from all directions. And even something like machine-gun fire. The fusillade does not stop, on the contrary, it is escalating. Something is going on and we are sitting here locked and hidden. We open the latch of the stove. We can hear the sounds from the outside better when we are standing. It is interesting. The fusillade continues, perhaps in the whole city. What is happening? Is it what we have been waiting for? Are we free? Has something changed in Warsaw?

It is quiet in the apartment. But some people are running in the courtyard. Some loud voices. Somebody is commanding something or somebody. We are racking our brains trying to figure out what this might mean but we cannot understand anything. We are speculating. But where shots are being fired against the Germans – this is where our side of the barricade is, this is our place. Where shots are being fired and where they are fighting against the Germans – this is where the combat is conducted also for our lives. For we should be there too.

We can hear echoes of the fusillade from Wola, Powiśle and Okęcie. It has been a couple of hours since the Krzyczkowskis went out and left us alone. It is getting dark when we hear a key scratching in the lock. Somebody opens the door and enters the apartment. I cautiously close the latch over my head and I am listening attentively. Zdzisio and Halina have come back. But I am not sure whether they are alone. After quite a few minutes we can hear Zdzisio’s voice,

"You can open the latch." When I do it, he says, "The latch can be open but some of you should stay there. Don't wander about the apartment. If you need to, one of you can go into the kitchen. Why are you in such a hurry?" I ask a number of questions to which I get partial and offhand answers. Zdzisio is clearly treating us with reserve, as if he wanted to prove to himself that he has nothing to do with us.

"Sit here on your asses, if you wanna stay here. So that nobody sees nothing, cos otherwise you're going to meet a sticky end. The Russkies are not here yet. The Germans have not escaped yet. They have killed some Krauts, but if the Fritzes come and start searching apartments, we will be in some serious trouble."

"But somebody is shooting," I say to him. "Who is shooting, and where? What are they saying in the street?"

"Sit quietly, I'm telling you. And don't try to be so smart. These lunatics will shoot a bit and then the Krauts will take care of them. If they come here it won't be a good thing."

Our faces fell. This is not what we have been waiting for. Zdzisio categorically announces,

"Nobody will leave the apartment, cos I won't let you out. Maryska has come, so she needs to sit here. I told her not to wander about here."

We use his permission and one by one we visit the toilet. We do not cook anything today and we hardly eat anything. Coming to us, Marysia brought a basket full of dry products and even some bread. She has dragged a substantial amount of provisions. Beans, peas, groats, everything that she has recently gotten for her hosts' food coupons and which they did not need. Marysia has also their food coupons on her. Together with her own coupon, there are five of them. For now the bread is the most useful thing. Today we can afford to hand out a thick slice of bread to everyone. Nevertheless, the hunger is getting to us. In the evening the fusillade almost ceases. We are awaiting the night. What will tomorrow bring us? How will all this end? But the situation has become more complicated. The Krzyczkowskis are kind of strange. They could be plotting against us. They are talking quietly in their room. They are discussing something. So something must have happened today in Warsaw. They are clearly isolating themselves from us. Still, we are less nervous than yesterday. . . .

Marysia says that the Russians are getting closer with each hour. She has heard in the city that they were going to march into Praga any minute then. The fighting is going on at the Otwock front line. But tonight it is quiet. We cannot hear anything. The guns are not firing. The war has stopped. The fearful silence east of Warsaw depresses us and makes us lose hope. All our hopes, all our calculations are based only on this victorious march of the Russian army. There is simply no other possibility that would bring us liberation and life. There is no other solution. We can be saved only from the east. If there are some complications, we are going to meet a sticky end.

On 2 August at dawn, when it was still quite dark, an escalated fusillade started in the whole city. We can hear shots even on our street. As if the whole city was the

first front line during a general offensive. We are totally at a loss. We have absolutely no idea what is going on. Something remarkable is happening in Warsaw, like a new September 1939, and we, hidden in her heart, are totally ignorant. We have some experience and we have got the hang of war. We have survived a month-long siege of Warsaw in September 1939. We took quite a good look at the war in the ghetto in April 1943. We are familiar with artillery, machine gun fire, air bombardment and firing planes. Since this morning we can hear explosions of heavy missiles. There are no Russian fighter planes in the sky, nor can we hear them. But suddenly a few German fighter planes, Stukas, fly low with a whistle, almost right above the roofs of the buildings. Obviously the anti-aircraft artillery is firing at them.

Today Zdzisio ate breakfast fast and went out onto the street. Not long after that, Halina went down too. They told us to sit quietly and that it would be best if we did not leave the hiding place.

“God forbid if anyone sees you through the window,” Zdzisio warns us.

The war has swept across the whole city. The fusillade does not stop. The Krzyczkowskis return at noon and only now does Zdzisio reveal that an uprising against the Germans broke out yesterday. The whole city is in the insurgents’ hands. They are killing the Germans on the streets. They are shooting everywhere.

“Alright, but can we go out?” I ask.

Halina puts in her oar:

“They are saying on the street that they are looking for Jews and that if they catch any, they’ll kill them.”

“If you wanna go, then go,” Zdzisio adds. “If you leave then I won’t let you into the apartment any more. You won’t come into the apartment again. I don’t want people laughing at me for hiding Jews at my place.”

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska*